

*Romantic Illusions
of the
Fool of Yangzhou*

COURTESANS
AND
OPIUM



Anonymous

TRANSLATED BY PATRICK HANAN

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Why did I write *Romantic Illusions*? While still a child, I lost my mother's care and my father's instruction. As a student I was lazy and much given to dissipation. After I grew up, I became enamored of the brothel scene and almost perished in its seductive trap. Over the course of thirty-odd years I met with more instances of beauty, ugliness, passion, and heartlessness than I could possibly enumerate. I squandered large sums of money—and got in return a quantity of false love and affection. When I came to ponder the meaning of that experience, I saw romance as an illusion, and so in a playful mood I began to write about it, naming my book *Romantic Illusions*. Perhaps it will frighten fools and awaken others, thereby helping me to atone a little for my misdeeds, and perhaps it will stand as a warning to posterity not to follow my sorry example.

— FROM THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE (1848)

INTRODUCTION

In his preface, and again in his first chapter, the author of *Fengyue meng* (*Romantic Illusions*) describes his book as a kind of penitence for thirty years spent in the brothels of Yangzhou—he hopes that it will serve as a warning to others not to follow his example. But although *Fengyue meng* is indeed a cautionary novel, it is also much more than that.¹ It explores the raffish underside of life in a famous city, and it does so in masterly fashion, in a well-crafted work. It is the first “city novel” in Chinese literature, confining itself to the heart of Yangzhou and showing a distinct civic awareness. (It led to the well-known novels set in the brothel quarter of Shanghai.)² In place of the stock figures and adventures of much cautionary fiction, it provides new characters and incident that credibly result from the author’s own observation and reflection. Finally, as any great work must be able to do, it transcends its author’s professed aims.

The word *fengyue* in the title suggests romance in the context of brothels and courtesans, while *meng* means dream as illusory experience. As the author looks back on his life in the brothels, he sees romance as nothing more than illusion. But how could a brothel ever be considered a locus of romance? The explanation lies in the nature of the higher-level brothels and the position of courtship in traditional Chinese society. In a system of strictly arranged marriages, the only place for courtship was with one’s wife after the wedding; apart from maids and prostitutes, a young man had no

opportunity to meet young women, let alone to court them. In Lin Yutang's words, "the courtesan supplied the need for courtship and romance which many men missed in their youth before marriage."³ Second, although sex was, of course, the *sine qua non* of the brothels, the courtesans were more than mere prostitutes. Pathetic as their situation undoubtedly was, they were trained from an early age in playing an instrument (usually the *pipa*, or plucked lute) and in singing operatic as well as popular songs. They dressed gorgeously, in the latest styles; note the amount of imported silk and other textiles described in this novel, as well as the expensive gold and silver jewelry. They acquired the various arts and graces of lively, attractive, and amusing companions. For their clients, on the other hand, the brothel held some of the qualities of a club; it was a place to meet friends, to exchange gossip and badinage, to eat and drink—especially when playing drinking games—and, in this period at least, to smoke opium. It was also a place of color and music, where a man could hear the latest songs and see the latest styles, and where he might, if he could afford it, establish a special relationship with a particular courtesan. She would even be able to accompany him on excursions in and around the city, which was more than his wife could decently do. Five such relationships are formed in the course of this novel.

The first chapter is a semihumorous polemic on the dangers posed by brothels and opium. (The dangers are closely linked because the brothels provided their guests with opium almost as readily as they offered them tea.) The novel proceeds to establish a group of five friends, four from Yangzhou, the other a visitor from Changshu, who swear brotherhood and afterward spend much of their time together. All are below the official level; one is a runner for the Customs, another works for the Salt Administration, a third runs a private loan-sharking business, a fourth is the son of a man who is in line for appointment to a lucrative post, and the fifth is the visitor from Changshu, who has no job or profession but whose father made a fortune from local court cases by brokering deals with defendants. They are married, some unhappily, but all are dedicated brothel goers. The novel is built on the relationships that develop between the five and their courtesan lovers through a series of events, several of which are beyond their control. Brothels were vulnerable to official campaigns, to local corruption and extortion, and to gang violence. This novel shows us their inner workings as they have not been shown before.

Yangzhou is the setting of the novel in a more than superficial sense. In the first chapter the narrator offers a personal vignette; he tells of seeing groups of youths sipping tea at a teahouse on Lower Commerce Street who, when they spot a boat passing by with prostitutes on board, decide to go in pursuit of it. In the next chapter we follow Lu Shu, the visitor from Changshu, along the city streets as he makes his way to the Parade, samples the entertainments, and calls in at a teahouse, where he comes upon a friend, Yuan You. The next morning we follow him again, street by street, as he goes to Yuan's house. On the way he pauses at one of the city gates to observe the swarms of people passing by in each direction; it is one of several occasions on which the author gives us a feeling of crowds, the essential quality of a city. All of this is told in the first three chapters. In the dialogue, and also in the author's commentary, Yangzhou is distinguished from other cities and even from its own past. For example, a particularly intricate form of jewelry must be from Shanghai, we are told, since the craftsmanship would be beyond the capacity of the Yangzhou silversmiths (chap. 3); and a certain performance, evidently of an early form of cross talk (*xiangsheng*), is described as unusual in Yangzhou but all the rage in Beijing (chap. 13). Yangzhou's festive and religious customs are described in detail, and local words and phrases, some of which are not yet to be found in any dictionary, are freely used. The degree of detail employed in the description, particularly of the dress of the courtesans and dandies, exceeds that of any previous Chinese novel.

One of the most notable accounts ever given of a Chinese city is actually devoted to Yangzhou: Li Dou's *Yangzhou huafang lu* (*The Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou*). Completed in 1795, it was the result, according to the author, of thirty years' observation. One may conjecture that its rich mixture of geographical, historical, and contemporary information (including rites and customs) inspired the author of *Fengyue meng*.⁴ It is referred to in chapter 5, when Lu Shu, the visitor to Yangzhou, remarks, on seeing some devastated palaces and gardens, that he had gained a far different impression from the *Yangzhou huafang lu*. This leads to a discussion of how the palaces and gardens have fallen into ruin in recent years. One of Lu Shu's companions quotes a *zhuzhici* (bamboo branch song) to that effect.

The bamboo branch song was a four-line poem with a local reference, most often to some aspect of a city—its physical features, customs, and so

on—usually with a humorous or satirical intent. Countless such poems were written about Chinese cities, by visitors as well as locals, and although they were never highly regarded, they often contain rare and valuable information on local characteristics. The *Fengyue meng* quotes no fewer than four poems from one collection that no longer exists, *Yangzhou yanhua zhuzhici* (*Bamboo Branch Songs on the Pleasure Houses of Yangzhou*). A fifth poem is the one on the ruined palaces and gardens that I have just mentioned; it is said to come from a different collection, *Yangzhou hushang zhuzhici* (*Bamboo Branch Songs on the Lake at Yangzhou*). Another poem, extemporaneously composed by one of the characters in chapter 16 during a visit to the Hundred Sons Room of the Guanyin temple, has all the characteristics of a bamboo branch song. The focus of the poems fitted the author's own interests; indeed, it would appear that in some places his own narrative has been arranged to accommodate them. One existing collection, *Hanjiang zhuzhici*, evidently had a particularly close relationship with the novel. It consists of eighty-seven poems by an anonymous author that survive only in manuscript form.⁵ Although none of its poems is copied into the novel, the contents of a number of them are readily apparent.⁶

Fengyue meng's most obvious literary relationship is with the *Shitou ji* (*Story of the Stone*), also known as *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), the great eighteenth-century novel that influenced much nineteenth-century fiction. Although it is never mentioned directly, its effect on *Fengyue meng* is clear to any reader. The chiming clock incident in chapter 7 echoes the *Shitou ji*, and a number of the songs sung by the young courtesan Fragrance are about well-known episodes involving Daiyu and Baoyu. The influence is most pronounced at the beginning and end, in Old Hand's defense of his novel and in his poems condemning all brothels. The defense is especially significant in that, like the *Shitou ji*, *Fengyue meng* is said to be about real people whom the author has known. Whether such a claim is true, and to what extent it is true, are not the point; the mere intention, even the pretense, of writing about known people tends to prevent typecasting.

The polemic in chapter 1 is about the dangers brothels present to young men, but it applies only partially to the five sworn brothers and their women. Lu Shu, who falls headlong in love with the unscrupulous Fragrance and is ultimately ruined, is an almost perfect example of the narrator's warnings, and Wei Bi, who is tricked out of some money by

Lucky, is a second, albeit trivial, case, but the other three are all exceptions. Wu Zhen is not so much ruined by his opium addiction as by his unwillingness to pay a bribe; Jia Ming is not ruined by his liaison with Phoenix, although he does lose her to another man; and Yuan You's affair with Paria turns into a surprising love story.

The fact is that the courtesans Cassia, Phoenix, and Paria, far from being the heartless and scheming sirens of the polemic, turn out to be interesting and sympathetic figures. Cassia is caught between fear of her protector and dependence on her paramour. The impulsive, extravagant Phoenix is spectacularly miscast as lover of the cautious, impecunious Jia Ming. And Paria, by her dedication to her new role as concubine or secondary wife, ends up as a kind of heroine.

It is clear that Lu Shu's love for Fragrance and Paria's for Yuan You are very different in nature. Lu Shu's love is rapturous, nonrational—he is regularly described as love struck or infatuated, despite the evidence of Fragrance's faithlessness—while Paria's is, according to her lights, supremely rational. Encouraged by her interpretation of a dream and an auspicious divination, she manipulates Yuan You into setting her up as his concubine but then serves him selflessly, even to the extent of taking her own life in order to accompany him to the netherworld. This is evidently the kind of love of which the author approved.

Her suicide, which, by its position at the end of the novel, assumes extraordinary importance, may seem at first sight to be an act of conformity to a social ideal, a kind of suttee, but the truth is more complex. The subject first comes up in chapter 10 when she dreams of two mandarin ducks that are killed by a single shot. She has heard that ideally husband and wife should die in the same hour. (The ideal actually applies to close friends, sworn brothers, rather than to husband and wife.) She has additional reasons for rejecting the remarriage that her dying husband suggests: she is afraid that, with her ill fate, she will fail in any alternative that she tries. And she is grateful to, and fond of, her husband, who has behaved well toward her, if toward no one else. Finally, she believes that he needs her at his side on his journey to the netherworld.

Of the Yangzhou women officially commended during the first half of the nineteenth century for their chastity, the vast majority were young widows in their teens or twenties who refused to remarry. A number of others

killed themselves because they were under pressure to remarry or were threatened with rape. Only a handful tried to kill themselves avowedly for love, and most of those were either dissuaded at the last moment or else failed in the attempt and did not repeat it.⁷ When, in 1918, Hu Shi wrote his celebrated essay condemning the traditional attitudes toward chastity in women, he conceded that, given a widow's belief in a union after death, love was a legitimate (*zhengdang*) motive for suicide.⁸ Paria's suicide, which was scarcely undertaken for posthumous fame, should be seen in this light. On the other hand, her father-in-law, who petitions for the commendation, wants to do her memory justice—and also to enhance his family's reputation. And there is a degree of satire in the alacrity with which the authorities rush to claim her for conventional morality.

The earliest known edition of *Fengyue meng* was published in 1883 by Shenbaoguan, a newspaper company owned and run by Ernest Major. Among Major's other publishing ventures, he arranged for the publication of a number of novels that had languished in manuscript. *Fengyue meng* may have been one of those unpublished novels, although it has an author's preface dated the eleventh month of 1848 in Yangzhou.

The Shenbaoguan edition was quickly followed by editions from other publishers. Such was the ascendancy of the Shanghai pleasure quarter in the latter half of the nineteenth century that, in 1900, the novel was actually transplanted to Shanghai, in an edition that changed all of its place-names but retained the rest of its text.⁹ In recent years modern editions of *Fengyue meng*, based either on the Shenbaoguan edition or one of its immediate successors, have become available.¹⁰

In his brief preface the author gives his name only as Hanshang mengren, which means something like the Ignoramus of Yangzhou or the Fool of Yangzhou, and says he is writing the book at the "south window of Red Plum Hall." A Red Plum Hall appears in chapter 10 of the novel; it is the site of the riddle contest run by local *littérateurs*. Apart from that possible connection, nothing else is known about the author.

I am grateful to Professor Liu Haiping, of Nanjing University, for arranging a visit to Yangzhou for my wife and me, and to the Chinese Literature Department of Yangzhou University for their hospitality during our stay.

INTRODUCTION

I am grateful also to Professors Huang Jinde and Huang Qiang, who gave up their time to show me the various places in and around the city that are referred to in the novel. I am greatly indebted to Professor Wang Ch'iu-kuei for help with the novel's descriptions of religious practices; to Professor Che Xilun for information about some religious terms; to Professors Tobie Meyer-Fong and Lucie Olivova for advising me about, or providing me with, important material on Yangzhou; and to the two anonymous readers of the manuscript for their suggestions.

COURTESANS AND OPIUM



CHAPTER ONE

*A libertine falls victim to courtesan wiles;
Old Hand holds forth on romantic illusions.*

LYRIC

I loved to sleep among the flowers¹
And daily take them in my arms,
Entranced for years with the gorgeous throng
And oft deceived by harlot charms.
Last night we swore eternal vows;
Today she's run away from me,
Her protestations all for naught;
Illusion—that's what love proves to be.

In the Warring States period of the Eastern Zhou dynasty, Guan Zhong,² the prime minister of Qi, set up three hundred brothels for the ease and comfort of the traveling merchant. Although the brothels were designed to enrich the state and facilitate commerce, the pernicious custom spread throughout the land and has continued ever since, in recent times even reaching beyond our borders. In the city of Yangzhou, which has always favored lavish display, the brothel quarter is the equal of any other, even those of Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing. Untold numbers of men, entranced by the Yangzhou courtesans, have squandered their property, ruined their families, and sacrificed their lives without ever repenting their ways.

Instead they clung stubbornly to the notion that they'd "rather die beneath the peony blossoms,³ for the ghosts have always been romantic figures."

Although stringent laws may be laid down against prostitution, and although they may be promulgated by enlightened officials, the popular saying still holds true: "Turtles are in touch with the denizens of the deep." No matter how strictly the official may enforce his prohibitions, those who run the brothels have ways of conveying a modest outlay in bribes to the official's aides, relatives, and personal attendants inside his residence as well as to his clerks outside it. The campaign will then be reduced to an empty exercise, a mere formality.

When boys reach the age of fourteen or fifteen and leave school, they are entirely dependent on their fathers and elder brothers for discipline and instruction. The first consideration must be their choice of friends. It is an age-old truth that "he who touches pitch is bound to be defiled." But if a boy can make friends with someone of excellent qualities, the two friends will be able to mold each other's characters, work hard at their studies, and succeed in the examinations, bringing honor to their families as well as to themselves. They will then serve diligently in whatever walk of life they find themselves in and establish their families in society. But if a boy takes up with the irresponsible sort of friend who tempts him into whoring and gambling; and if his parents are overindulgent and fail to monitor his behavior; and if, on top of that, the boy does not realize how hard it was for his parents to succeed in life, he will indulge in lavish expenditure and go from bad to worse, ending up among the dregs of society.

Nonetheless, deplorable as gambling may be, those who gamble may win as well as lose. By contrast, whoring is an unmitigated disaster.

Your narrator has personally observed youths who, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, while still dependent on the hard-won support of their parents and elder brothers, like nothing better than dressing up in brilliant clothes of the latest style. At first, their behavior is nothing worse than gathering in groups of three or four to drink tea at some teahouse along Lower Commerce Street⁴ and to gamble for porcelain, fruit, toys, and the like. But then they spot a pleasure boat emerging from the sluice by Tiansing Gate, and perhaps there will be some prostitutes on board who are being taken on an outing, prostitutes dressed either as boys or as girls, wearing vivid colors and with their faces fully made up. They will be singing operatic arias or

popular songs, and their lilting voices will be accompanied by the haunting notes of a flute. At this sight the boys will fairly ache with desire and, after a hurried consultation, decide to hire a boat and follow them. But even this amounts to nothing more than gazing at girls. It may cost them something for the boat, the food, and the drink, but no great harm has been done. The real danger is that there may be someone in the group who knows the house the girls come from and who takes his friends along for an introductory tea party,⁵ after which they gradually become better acquainted and go on to hold banquets there and stay overnight. No matter how stingy you are with your money, the prostitutes of the pleasure quarter have ways of sweet-talking that money right out of your pocket and into theirs. They can even beguile you into considering your wife as a stranger and these places as your permanent home.

Some of the consequences are quite ludicrous. Parents tell their son to do something for them or to buy some item of clothing, and he answers back that he hasn't the time or the money, offering a whole string of excuses. But when the prostitute he is in love with issues one of her requests for clothing or jewelry, even if he has no money, he'll move heaven and earth to borrow some and lose no time in buying the item, solely to please her. The strange thing, however, is that no prostitute has ever been known to express any pleasure, even when her request is met. If it's an item of clothing she asked for, she'll complain about the material, the color, or the fit, or say that either the trim or the pattern is unsatisfactory, or that the garment is too long or too short. In the case of jewelry, she'll say that the gold is too pale, or the silver too unsightly, or the design outdated, or the gold-plating or the kingfisher feathers unsatisfactory, or the hairpin too long or too short, or the bracelet too large or too small, or the headband too thin or too thick, or the ear pick too light or too heavy. In terms of the common saying, it's like pouring good money down a bottomless pit.

When the boy grows up, even if he fails to learn anything from his elders and proves irresponsible and goes wrong, his parents will still be reluctant to punish or scold him. If they are somehow driven to desperation and make a few critical or harsh remarks, the more incorrigible sons will answer them right back. By contrast, in the pleasure quarter the same sort of youth will find the prostitute constantly twisting his ears, hitting him, yelling at him, even biting him, while he sits there convulsed with

laughter, pretending to be at his ease and enjoying the experience. Actually he is dead scared that if he is too critical he will anger her and be left with nowhere to go for his pleasures. If a man could only show his parents the same consideration that he shows the prostitute he is in love with, buying them clothes or food when they want it, not striking back when they hit him or answering back when they scold him, he would qualify as the world's leading exemplar of filial piety.

There are some playboys who become so entranced with the brothel scene, its daily banquets and nightly concerts, that they completely ignore the fact that their own households are short of food and fuel. They truly "cut a dash in the world at large while at home they starve." So enamored are they of the prostitutes of the quarter that they stay out night after night and forget that their wives are sleeping alone. The more virtuous wives will merely bemoan the sad fate that proverbially awaits the pretty woman and keep their frustration to themselves, reluctant to criticize their husbands in public lest it reflect badly on them. Other wives, ignorant of moral principle, will, when their husbands are constantly out pursuing their own pleasures, wait until they return and then start quarreling with them, cursing them up hill and down dale and threatening to commit suicide. But there is also a third kind of low, shameless wife who says to herself that if her husband can play around outside the house, she can do the same thing at home. She holds many a clandestine tryst and does a number of disgraceful things behind her husband's back, and then, when people start making snide remarks, she talks about a "fair exchange."

The fact is that when a man first forms a relationship in these places, he is lavish with his money and responsive to all the prostitute's requests, while she fawns over him and swears she will never leave him for an instant. Some prostitutes will want to live with him as his mistress, while others will want to marry him, wishing only that they might live and die together with him. But while he is still sitting in the prostitute's room, she'll be off entertaining a newly arrived client in another room and saying the very same things to him.

There are also able and intelligent playboys who, after endless scheming and the sacrifice of a good deal of personal integrity, have acquired money that they then faithfully turn over to the prostitutes. These men know perfectly well that the prostitutes' blandishments are all sweet talk

designed to trick people out of their money, but they still insist that, while it may be flattery when addressed to the rest of mankind, it is perfectly sincere when addressed to them. Without this conviction, how could these men, who are by no means stupid, be so willing to part with their money? But no matter how much you have spent in these places, when the money runs out and you owe on your brothel tab or you haven't responded to a request, the prostitute will show you an entirely different face, casting to the winds her usual loving attitude and fixing you with a cold, contemptuous eye. Even the brothel stewards will look down their noses at you. And not only will your lack of money expose you to the prostitute's sneers, you will also be made to feel highly uncomfortable should your clothes start to look a little shabby.

There is also a species of admirer who will get jealous and compete with you for a prostitute, even resorting to violence, which will lead to a tragic incident and a subsequent court case. And if in one of these places you offend some relative or aide of the magistrate, you may be arrested by the night patrol and sentenced to a beating or to exile. As soon as the prostitute sees you in trouble, despite all the love she has shown you in the past, she will either take off for home with all your possessions or else set herself up in some other city, leaving you to face the music on your own while she blithely disports herself beyond the reach of the law. Many a playboy regards his lavish expenditure in the brothel as of small consequence but is unwilling to spend much money on the particular prostitute he passes his time with. This incurs her deep loathing when in bed with him, which causes him to suffer a venereal disease, with its chancres and buboes, a disease that in its mildest form results in bleeding and suppuration and in its severest form in death. There are also fellows from the local yamen as well as other rascally characters who routinely use their power to extort free banquets and nights in the brothel. The prostitutes go in fear of them and make a show of currying their favor, but privately they are resentful and, if they can take up with the magistrate or one of his aides or relatives, they will lodge a "pillow accusation" against the freeloaders. When the latter find themselves investigated and hauled off to court, they still don't know where their trouble originated—a perfect example of the saying "An open thrust may be easy to dodge, but a secret shaft is hard to avoid."

Let me put this question to you: How many of you who are enamored of prostitutes have ever come across one who gave you any money? Or who brought any of her own money into a marriage? Of course, no such beneficial event has occurred in recent times, but let us just suppose that by some remote chance a prostitute did bring a good deal of money into a marriage. You would still need to keep this thought in mind: she made that money with the body her parents gave her, and she was now using the money to join you with that same body of hers. Just imagine if your own wife, sister, sister-in-law, or daughter had been supporting a man and sleeping with him and had then gone off with someone else. Would you be inclined to let the matter rest there?

Now, since whoring has all these liabilities and not a single advantage, it may surprise you to learn that there is an even worse scourge in existence: the currently fashionable use of opium, which is particularly prevalent in the pleasure quarter. No sooner has a playboy arrived at the door of a brothel—whether or not he is an addict, whether or not he has smoked before—than a lamp will be lit and a prostitute summoned to lie opposite and roast the opium for him. The addicts go without saying, but even someone who is not addicted will take the opportunity to enjoy a chat and a few laughs with the prostitute and perhaps prolong his visit. The first day he will inhale once or twice, the next day three or four times, and within a few days his addiction will have taken an unbreakable hold on him. It will then become a lifelong burden, one from which only death can free him. Truly a case of one menace giving rise to another!

Your narrator himself, when young and naive, was much given to dissipation and spent upward of thirty years entranced with the brothel scene. I cannot tell you how many prostitutes have been close to me, so close that they couldn't bear to be apart for an instant, nor can I tell you how many oaths of eternal fidelity they swore. Some wanted to marry me, others wanted to be set up as my mistress, but after cheating me out of my money, they either married other men or took off for home with all my belongings, or set themselves up in some other city. When the love they had professed for me came to an end, they scattered to the four winds. As a result, I have come to regard the pleasure quarter with a cold and critical eye, as a place too dangerous to visit. I once wrote a poem on the subject:

Sirens await you in the house of joy,
So beware the ambushes there deployed.
You're invincible, your banners claim,
But insidious attacks you can't avoid.
Their smiling faces will entice your soul;
Their carmined lips will suck your brains away.
Once caught in their snares you'll never escape,
So for all your prowess don't join the fray.

One day, with time on my hands, I chanced to take a stroll outside the city. All of a sudden my thoughts turned to the brothels I had known and the love the prostitutes had shown me, and the more I thought about them, the more enthralled I became. Without quite realizing where I was going, I arrived at a place from which I could see in the distance a steep mountain with strange outcroppings of rock. I walked around the mountain's base and came to a lake thousands of feet deep with waves roiling its surface as far as the eye could see. Circling the lake until I reached the foot of the mountain, I found a stone stele about five feet high with words carved on it in large characters. I looked closely: Mount Self-Deception, Lake Unfathomable. Curious as to what it might be like on top of the mountain, I started pulling myself up on the undergrowth. After climbing for a mile or more with many twists and turns, I reached the summit, which I found to be covered with towering, age-old trees. At the foot of one of them two old men were sitting opposite each other. One had silver hair, a ruddy complexion, and the look of a divine being. The other was white-haired and toothless, with gaunt, withered features. In his hand he held a book of some kind that he and his companion were reading together.

By this time I was footsore and weary, and since I didn't know the way, I bowed low before the two men and asked, "Good sirs, I'm afraid I have lost my way. I beg you to tell me what lies up ahead."

The man with the silver hair and ruddy complexion looked up and gazed off into the distance. "The way ahead is long, while the road behind is far from certain," he said. "But let me ask *you* something. Why do you have so much to say for yourself?"

This remark struck me as very odd, so I gave another bow. "Let me ask Your Reverences your names in religion, your ages, and the ethereal abode in which you dwell. And what is that book you're reading?"

"I am the Old Man Beneath the Moon," said the first one, "and I was born goodness knows how many years ago. I once lived in the realms above, where I was in charge of all the marriages on earth. Before boys and girls became engaged, I would bind their feet together with red thread, and their marriage destinies would forever depend on that thread. But I felt sorry for all those foolish men and women who had karmic involvements from previous existences that they needed to resolve in this one. Sometimes the involvement might take three or four years to resolve, at other times an incarnation or two. I felt pity for them and made a practice of tying the threads together and completing their marriages. I never anticipated the disastrous consequences that would ensue—the ruin of families, the death of individuals, the corruption of society. The Emperor of Heaven got so angry with me that he exiled me to earth. Only when mankind as a whole no longer indulges in lustful desire will I be permitted to return to the realms above. With nothing to occupy me on these mountains, I often spend time with Old Hand [Guo Lairen]⁶ here."

The white-haired, toothless one then introduced himself. "My name is Old Hand. I was born in Penitence county in Contrition prefecture. I am not yet sixty, but when I was young and naive, I made the mistake of frequenting the brothel scene, where the sharp tongues and insidious attacks of the prostitutes left me frail and weak, toothless and white-haired. Luckily I had not yet reached the end of my allotted span. I managed to escape the snares of enchantment and see through the vanities of the world, and so I came here to live in seclusion. With plenty of time on my hands, I have written a book about all the things I witnessed and named it *Romantic Illusions*. I brought it with me today for my old friend's amusement. I never expected to meet you here."

I followed up with more questions. "There are one or two other things I would like to ask Your Reverence," I said. "What is the book about, and in which period is it set? I hope you will enlighten me."

"Although the title does contain the word 'romantic,' it does not touch on anything lewd or obscene. Nor does it resemble those historical tales set in the Han, Tang, Song, or Ming dynasties, tales in which for every loyal

official there has to be a treacherous one plotting his downfall. Other stock elements are a border state planning an insurrection; a beautiful damsel sent to propitiate the barbarians; battles and victories; and demons and monsters doing their worst.

"Then there are all those varieties of the love story, in which the boy has an illicit affair or the girl takes a lover or the maid seduces the young master. The couple vow privately to marry but are thwarted by someone, after which the boy dresses up as a girl or the girl as a boy, and they elope together. Or else the girl's parents resent her fiancé's poverty and force her to renounce the engagement, then hire a thief to plant stolen goods on the fiancé, who confesses under torture but is rescued from jail or the execution ground. It turns out to be the Dame of Lishan or the Spirit of Planet Venus⁷ who has rescued him in the nick of time. After he has won first place in the Palace Examination, been appointed governor, and received from the emperor the sword of summary justice, he repays his debts of gratitude and avenges the wrongs done to him. Oh, they're all the same, these novels! Perhaps the author holds a grudge against someone but keeps it close to his chest and tries to vent his spite by destroying the man's reputation; or else he admires somebody's wife or daughter but has had no success with her and writes a lot of novels or plays to show off his erotic or lascivious verses. Such works as these are only too apt to corrupt people's minds and do harm to social morality.

"This book of mine, by contrast, is composed of real actions by a handful of people whom I have observed with my own eyes. Nothing has been added, nothing deleted. And now, just as I finish it, by some lucky chance you happen along—I expect fate had a hand in it. I shall give you the book to take back with you. Perhaps it will awaken people from their illusions. Whatever you do, you must not merely skim through it." With that, he handed me the book.

There was no time to read it there, so I tucked it in my sleeve. And then in a flash, a gust of fresh wind sprang up and the two old men had vanished! Hastily I cast my eyes up to the heavens and offered them my humble thanks before descending the mountain the same way I had come up. When I reached the lake, however, I found that the once desolate place was now filled with brothels—a veritable riot of color. There were many houses and many prostitutes, all of them gorgeously dressed and

elaborately made up. They invited me in, speaking in delightful tones and moving with a sinuous grace. Some of them asked for jewelry, some for dresses, others for money or trinkets. Some invited me in for a drink, others to spend the night. Unable to control my passions, I chose a beautiful one and went with her into her bedroom, where we made love and slept until dawn. But when I awoke and looked about me, all the brothels and beauties were gone! I was lying down in the wilds, and beside me was a bleached skeleton, which gave me such a fright that I let out a great cry and awakened with a start. I concluded it had all been a strange dream—until I felt something in my sleeve. When I took it out, it proved to be a book with the words “Romantic Illusions” on the cover. I was amazed. On opening it, I found a verse that ran as follows:

Why write *Romantic Illusions*?
It's nothing but rubbish or worse.
But it just might awaken some fools,
So let people mock me or curse.

But whom does *Romantic Illusions* tell of, and what actions does it tell? Readers, if you do not find my tale too tedious, pray read on and you will find the answer.



CHAPTER TWO

Yuan You meets an old friend in a teahouse;

Wu Jingyu transmits news on the Parade.

In Jiangdu county of Yangzhou prefecture there lived a man named Yuan You, style Youying. His grandfather, Yuan Zhang, had been a student at the prefectural school, while his father, Yuan Shou, had succeeded in the provincial examination, military division. Yuan You had enjoyed a pampered childhood. He never completed his academic studies and was too slight and feeble to take part in military training. Following precedent, his grandfather bought him a position at the ninth rank, secondary level. He was married to a Mistress Du, but so far they had no children.

Yuan You was of a wily, deceitful nature, and he was much given to visiting brothels and round-the-clock dissipation. Trading on his grandfather's prestige, he ran a loan-sharking business, offering loans at two percent interest per month on a principal discounted ten percent or at one percent interest per month on a principal discounted twenty percent.¹ He also took up with a gang of rogues who made a habit of shaking down gambling dens and brothels and engaging in all kinds of racketeering and blackmail. When he was in his twenties the senior provincial judge sent down an order to Jiangdu county for his arrest and detention. His father and grandfather, pulling goodness knows how many strings and spending a considerable amount of money, managed to obtain a light sentence for him: he was to be stripped of his rank and exiled to Changshu county in Suzhou prefecture.

At the end of three years, on the completion of his exile, he returned home, only to find that in the meantime his grandfather had died. He greeted his parents and then his wife, whom he thanked for her scrupulous attendance on his parents during his exile. She responded with a curtsy, and then with bittersweet emotions each told of the sorrows of separation. A banquet was held to celebrate the family reunion.

After a few days at home, Yuan You held a discussion with his wife. They decided to pawn some of her clothes and jewelry, and with the proceeds he would set himself up again in the loan-sharking business; the interest from the loans would provide them with enough to live on. As a confirmed debauchee, however, he still gathered every day with a handful of friends. This was a case of "birds of a feather," for the friends were also the kind of men who were used to loan-sharking and frequenting brothels.

One afternoon he was in the Futura teahouse on the Parade² drinking tea and chatting with two friends, Jia Ming, a clerk in the offices of the Salt Administration,³ and Wu Zhen, a runner for the Yangzhou Customs. Their lively exchange of views had to do with the brothel scene. One gave it as his opinion that a certain courtesan in a certain house had a nice personality; the second remarked that another courtesan in another house had an especially pleasant manner with her clients; and the third held that one courtesan had the best voice for grand opera, a second for popular song, a third for Beijing opera, while a fourth was the best actress, a fifth had the best head for drink, a sixth kept the best table, a seventh was the best at the game of guess-fingers, and an eighth had the best bed. Then, just as the discussion was at its liveliest, in walked a young man of about twenty with a pale, round face and fine eyes and eyebrows. A large queue hung down his back bound with an expensive black braid. On his head he wore a turquoise blue woolen cap embroidered with gold couching. On the front was fastened a red-gold peony design decorated in kingfisher feather and inset with a crimson gemstone ornament. It also had a crimson silk knob on top and eight-inch raw silk tassels arranged at the back. He wore an egg-white gown of imported crepe silk with a corn poppy design, and over it a military-style formal jacket of foreign-blue wool lined with plain white damask and fastened with cassia-bud buttons. From the top button hung an emerald green circular pendant with a dragon motif, attached to which were a gold disk and a gold cord with five gold toothpicks on it. Through

the parting in the gown one could see a pair of pale green trousers with an embroidered hem, a belt with a hibiscus design in pale pink, gold, and white, and over trousers of hollyhock imported crepe lined with a jade green light silk, and greenish blue lined socks of Hangzhou silk with a motif of dragons embracing a pillar. On his feet he wore a pair of fashionable reddish black shoes of tribute satin embroidered with white feather. The soles of the shoes were padded with twenty-eight layers of felt.

On his left thumb he wore an archery ring of pale green and gold pricked with red gold. On his middle finger was a red-gold hoop-shaped ring and two interlocking gold rings, and on his arm a gold rope-style bracelet weighing a good four ounces. In his right hand he held a genuine Zhang Ziyuan⁴ Hangzhou fan of real ebony with thirty-two ribs and with its sides flecked in gold. A good-looking young page followed him into the teahouse.

In the inner room, the newcomer caught sight of Yuan You and rushed over and bowed before him, beaming with delight. "Brother, it's been *such* a long time since we parted! What luck to meet you here!" Yuan You recognized him at once as a sworn brother from his years of exile in Changshu. His name was Lu Shu, style Wenhua, and he was not yet twenty. His father was a prison officer in the criminal department of Changshu county. Shrewd, capable, and smart, the father had managed to please a succession of magistrates, and, by brokering deals with defendants, had accumulated a great deal of wealth. Lu Shu was an only child, and his father had indulged him to the full, allowing him to lead a life of dissipation. After meeting Yuan You in a Changshu brothel, he had sworn an oath of brotherhood with him and spent his days and nights in Yuan's company, becoming closer to him than a blood brother. When Yuan You came to the end of his exile and was free to return home, Lu Shu threw a farewell party for him, gave him presents as well as food and drink for the journey, and personally saw him on board the boat. Even then, he was still reluctant to part and said his good-bye in tears.

Since then Lu Shu had married, but his wife came from a highly educated family and was also very plain. She did not get on at all well with her husband and usually slept in a separate room, as a result of which she had not become pregnant in the two or three years of their marriage. Lu Shu's father happened to have an elder sister who had married a man living in

Yangzhou, and because his son was spending all of his time in the brothels, and because he himself was longing for a grandson, he gave Lu Shu five hundred taels to go to Yangzhou and buy himself a concubine. He added several dozen taels for expenses and told the son to stay with his aunt in Yangzhou and ask his uncle to arrange the marriage for him.

Having heard that Yangzhou was a city with a luxurious lifestyle, Lu Shu had surreptitiously helped himself to a thousand taels as well as three or four hundred silver dollars⁵ from his mother's private savings and tucked the money away in his baggage. He had arrived in Yangzhou only the day before. His uncle's house was on South Canalside inside Customhouse Gate, and his uncle was in charge of accounts for the Salt Administration. Lu Shu had been welcomed by his uncle and aunt and invited to stay with them and use the study as his bedroom. That afternoon, with nothing particular to do, he had set off for the Parade in search of amusement with his young page, Felix, in attendance. He had watched some magic tricks, looked at a foreign peep show,⁶ listened to some Huai storytelling,⁷ and then to some men in drag, with hairpins stuck in their hair, who swayed sinuously as they sang a few popular songs. By that time he was both hungry and thirsty, so he stopped in at the Futura teahouse, where he came upon Yuan You, bowed, and exclaimed, "It's been *such* a long time since we parted!"

Yuan You was quick to return the bow. "*Wonderful* to see you again, Brother!" he exclaimed, as he invited Lu Shu to join him at his table. Felix paid his respects to Yuan You, who sent him off to join the other pages at a separate table. Jia Ming and Wu Zhen then introduced themselves.

"How are your parents?" asked Yuan You. "You were all so generous to me when I was in Changshu that I shall never forget it. But what brings you here to Yangzhou?"

"My parents are quite well, thank you. I'm afraid we treated you poorly; do forgive us. I've missed you every day since you left. I've been sent here by my father to visit my aunt. I arrived only yesterday and haven't yet been to visit your family, I'm ashamed to say."

"Not at all," said Yuan You. The two men then brought each other up to date on what had happened to them since they parted. "What is your uncle's name?" asked Yuan You. "Where does he live, and what work does he do? Tomorrow morning I'll go and pay my respects to him."

"His name is Xiong Dajing. He's an accountant in the Salt Administration and has a house on South Canalside. But I wouldn't dream of putting you to the trouble of going there. Let me visit you tomorrow morning."

While this exchange was going on, another young man arrived at the teahouse. He, too, was about twenty, with pale, smooth features. He was wearing a flat-crowned cap of pale pink imported crepe. On the front was a twin hibiscus design on a gold and emerald base, in the middle of which was set a crimson gemstone. There was also a crimson knob on top of the cap and crimson tassels over two feet long hanging down behind it. He wore a greenish blue gown of tribute silk, and over it a military-style formal jacket of crepe silk in a large, gold-flecked pattern with a jade green damask lining and gold cassia-bud buttons. From the top button hung a pure white jade pendant with a dragon motif to which was attached a gold cord with three gold toothpicks. He wore pale green over trousers with a red-gold lining of fine silk. His shoes were of black satin in a fashionable style. In his hand he held a genuine speckled bamboo fan measuring one foot square with a famous man's calligraphy on its white surface.

He swaggered into the teahouse, followed by his page. The waiters were quick to welcome him, but he ignored them and went straight on inside. At sight of him, Yuan You got to his feet and invited him to join them. The newcomer beamed with delight on seeing Yuan You and bowed in greeting. The others invited him to take a seat, and, after a show of polite reluctance, he joined them at their table and asked their names. Yuan You introduced them, pointing first at Jia and Wu. "This is Jia Ming, style Xinpan, and that is Wu Zhen, style Yingshi. Both are from Yangzhou. This gentleman," he said, pointing at Lu Shu, "is Lu Shu, style Wenhua, who is from Changshu and arrived here only yesterday. He's a sworn brother of mine from my days in Changshu."

The others then asked the young man's name. "He's Wei Bi, style Qingyuan. He's the most convivial of men. His father is the candidate⁸ for the Lianghuai region of the Salt Administration, and they have a compound on Brown Rice Lane."

As they chatted following the introductions, a few vendors approached Wei Bi, some carrying baskets, others trays, and after placing handfuls of melon seeds, candied fruit, and the like on the table in front of him, they called out "Sir," then withdrew without saying a word about payment and

went off to peddle their wares at other tables. Wei Bi handed around the things that they had left behind.

Then other vendors came up with baskets of articles to play for, including colorful, highly decorated porcelain, foreign crepe-silk handkerchiefs, wallets, purses, fan cases, dominoes, chessmen, erotic pictures, tobacco cases, and so forth. They stood at Wei Bi's elbow and cajoled him into playing. He chose four multicolored porcelain teacups from the basket and negotiated a price of three hundred and eighty cash a game. The vendor produced a small stool from under his arm and sat down on it. Then he took out a little brush with which he swept the dust away. He brought out six Kaiyuan coins⁹ with holes in the middle and tossed them on the floor, then grouped them into three heads and three tails and placed them in Wei Bi's palm, holding Wei's wrist with his other hand. Several assistants beside the vendor began clamoring "Go! Go!" The vendor nodded, and Wei Bi arranged the six coins in his fingers and tossed them on the ground. The assistants counted the heads and tails, then gathered up the coins and handed them back to Wei, who threw them down again. In all he threw five times, but had only two wins against three losses. "That's enough," he said. Without asking for payment, the vendor got up and, taking his stool and basket with him, went off with his assistants.

Calling the waiter over, Yuan You ordered wheat cakes with onion sauce, large buns filled with chicken, and so forth, and they had their afternoon tea. As pleasure-seeking young men whiling away the time in idle talk, they grew closer and closer to one another and ended up as firm friends.

Just then a man who was drinking tea at the next table came over, sat himself down next to Yuan You without a word of greeting to the company, and announced: "Have you heard the latest?" Yuan replied that he hadn't. "Well, at Soft Quarters near Hongqing Garden, across the river from the Customhouse, they had a girl from Yancheng, Ailin by name, who was working there on a split-fee basis.¹⁰ She'd been going with a tailor for over a year, but the man's wife was jealous and constantly quarreled with her. Last night Ailin went to her room and shut the door as if she were going to sleep, but instead she swallowed some raw opium¹¹ that she'd gotten from who knows where. This morning, when the tailor got up in his wife's room, he noticed that Ailin's door was still shut. He called out to her and got no response, so he became suspicious, opened her door,

and found her lying dead on the bed. In a panic he rushed off to buy a coffin and had her body laid in it. Right now he's taking the coffin back to Yancheng. I'm wondering who her relatives are, what they'll have to say about this, and how it will all play out.

"And I have another bit of news, too. Eardrop House on Ridge Street recently took on a girl called Xiuhong on an indentured basis. She's also from Yancheng, and only fifteen. She has a clear complexion and her feet measure less than four inches. She was indentured for twenty thousand cash a quarter. The payment had been handed over and she had just been settled in a room upstairs when, astonishingly, the night before last she quietly opened her window and somehow got out onto the roof. Then she wandered from rooftop to rooftop until she came to a house on Liancheng Lane, where she jumped down, giving the owner of the house the shock of his life. He thought it must be a burglar, but when he lit a lantern, he was stunned to find a girl there. In answer to his questions she said she'd been forced into prostitution by Eardrop House and was being subjected to beatings and curses all day long, so she had run away in the middle of the night. The house owner was a clerk in some yamen, and he had a licentiate living in the house with him. They handed the girl over to the local warden to press the case.

"As it turned out, however, the girl's father had not gone back to Yancheng after receiving the first payment, and the next morning he stormed into Eardrop House demanding the return of his daughter and practically turned the place upside down. Later the director of the Children's Protection Center heard of the case and had the girl taken to Chastity House,¹² where they'll choose a husband for her. As for the father, only when they threatened to take him to court for selling his daughter into prostitution did he slink off with his tail between his legs. He'd been trying on a bit of blackmail, but now he's lost both money and daughter. Fortunately for Eardrop House, it had good connections with one of the magistrate's aides, and this man now came forward and took care of matters, persuading the house owner not to press charges and paying him a good deal of money. What with gratuities for the warden and the constables, as well as the quarterly payment for the girl, the Eardrop had to pay out quite a lot, and even so they only narrowly avoided a lawsuit. Well, gentlemen, what do you make of these two items? Pretty unusual, huh? Newsworthy, wouldn't you say?"

Everyone agreed that they were very unusual, after which, having delivered his news, the speaker returned to his own table.

"Who was *that*?" asked Lu Shu.

"His name is Wu Jingyu. He's a military student," said Yuan You. "He spends his time freeloading off the brothels, racketeering, and squeezing pigeons,¹³ as well as going after shady money. I know him, but when we meet I normally just nod and leave it at that. We've never been close. I can't imagine why he suddenly descended on us today and told us these pointless stories. Ridiculous, wasn't it?"

"You should keep your distance from that sort of person," said Jia Ming. "It's best to treat what he said as if you'd never heard it."

They went on chatting for a while until the sun began to set. Yuan then invited Lu Shu to supper, but he declined. "I didn't tell my aunt where I was going, and I'm afraid she'll be expecting me. However, tomorrow morning I'll certainly come and pay my respects to your parents and impose on you again."

Yuan You saw that he could not persuade him. "I had every intention of paying my respects to your uncle and aunt tomorrow, but since you promise to visit us, I shall welcome you at home. In fact, I would like to prevail on all of you gentlemen to join us for lunch tomorrow." The other three accepted the invitation.

Lu Shu took leave of the gathering and went off with Felix, his page. Yuan You told the waiter to put the tea on his account, and the waiter and the tobacco vendor agreed. He and his friends then left the teahouse with their pages. "I'll expect you tomorrow, then," Yuan You reminded them. "I'll be waiting for you at home. I won't send out any invitations." They agreed and went their separate ways.

If you are wondering what happened, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER THREE

Lu Shu visits a friend on North Willow Lane;

Wu Zhen smokes opium in the west parlor.

After meeting Yuan You by chance in the Futura teahouse on the Parade, Lu Shu returned to his uncle's house, where he had supper and chatted with his aunt until it was time for bed.

Early the following morning he prepared visiting cards for Yuan You's parents ("from your nephew") and for Yuan You himself ("from your younger brother") and put on a fashionable bright-red woolen hat with a high crown of tribute silk and a medium-blue lined crepe-silk robe tied with a silken sash that had a white-jade dragon-shaped catch. From the sash hung a foreign watch, a fan case, a purse, a small knife, and other items. Over the gown he wore a lined surcoat of black crepe silk.

Felix accompanied him, carrying his visiting cards, his cap, his clothes case, and his water pipe as they made their way from his uncle's house on South Canalside as far as the yamen on Changzhen Street. The yamen's entrance was directly opposite Customhouse Gate, which was also the site of a boat dock. Throngs of people were going by in both directions. Lu Shu and Felix walked slowly along at the same pace as the crowd, taking in the scene:

The gate is known as Customhouse, a thoroughfare by land and water;
The highest offices are here, including the Customs Administration.
The gate links the Chu region and Jiangsu province

COURTESANS AND OPIUM

And leads on to Lianghuai and Shandong.
 People pass by in an endless stream,
 Tightly packed one against the other.
 The Customs Office, investigating the evasion of duties, displays a
 tiger's head emblem to indicate its might;
 The guardhouse squad, tracking down evildoers, show a wolf's tooth
 symbol to indicate their power.
 The lanterns in front of the inns beckon the traveler;
 The signboards outside the shops invite the merchant.
 People enter and leave the city, their breath forming a cloud overhead;
 Porters carry goods on their backs or on their poles, their sweat falling
 like rain.
 In the market, loads of orchids, loads of dried meat, give off a pleasant
 odor;
 On the streets, loads of night soil, loads of filthy water, emit a disgust-
 ing smell.
 With their loads of vegetables, loads of fish, the porters strive to be first;
 With their loads of well water, loads of river water, the carriers travel
 in groups.
 The porters of firewood jostle their way forward in hopeless disorder;
 The chairs of the salt merchants, with six bearers and three pages, fly
 past in profusion.
 Women menders, baskets over their arms, offer to patch your clothes:
 Itinerant friars, beating their wooden fish, beg for your copper coins.
 Girlish boys, rouged and powdered,
 —If people took them for catamites, they'd be arrested—
 Work hard at their begging.
 Cart loads, mule loads, go by with their goods;
 Merchants, hawkers, ply their wares.
 This truly is the hub of the ten provinces,
 With all the worldly prosperity of a famous central city.

Lu Shu passed the yamen gate on Changzhen Street and turned into Ridge Street, where he saw the many Daichunlin cosmetics shops.¹ In some of them the counters were besieged by customers buying perfume and cosmetics, while others were deserted. As a newcomer to Yangzhou, Lu Shu

was puzzled by this fact but did not like to ask the reason. He passed by Taiping Dock and went as far as the crossroads outside Little East Gate,² where he asked directions of a shopkeeper. He then continued north, entering Great Scholar Quarter and passing along South Willow Lane to North Willow Lane, where he asked the way to Yuan You's house. On entering the main gate, he was confronted by a set of four white-painted doors, all of them closed. Felix rapped on one, and a servant appeared at a side door and said, "May I ask the gentleman's name?"

Felix handed him the two visiting cards. "My master has come to pay a visit. Kindly inform them."

The servant glanced at the cards. "Just a moment," he said, and went in. After a short wait, the two central doors opened wide, and the servant said, "This way, please, sir." Lu Shu walked in, followed by Felix.

Yuan You had come out in front of the main hall, and he now invited his visitor in. Lu Shu wanted to ask Yuan You's father to come out so that he could pay his respects, but Yuan You said, "I'm afraid he's suffering from a slight indisposition. Perhaps you could meet him some other time." Lu Shu also asked if he could go into the rear quarters and pay his respects to Yuan's mother and wife, but again Yuan demurred. In the end the two men bowed to each other and went inside and sat down.

As a servant brought them tea, Yuan You remarked, "I had no idea you'd be coming to Yangzhou. I still haven't been to your uncle's house to offer my respects, and meanwhile you've done me the favor of coming here to see me. Very remiss of me, I'm afraid."

"I'm late coming here, and I hope you'll forgive me," said Lu Shu. Yuan You persuaded Lu Shu to exchange his hat for a cap. Lu also took off his surcoat and handed it to Felix, then put on a reddish black, shiny woolen formal jacket lined with jade green damask that Felix produced from the clothes case.

As they were being offered a second cup of tea, a servant's voice could be heard from the doorway announcing two new arrivals. "Masters Jia and Wu are here." Yuan You and Lu Shu had hardly risen to their feet when Jia Ming and Wu Zhen came into the hall. The men greeted each other, then chatted while they drank their tea.

Before very long there was a further announcement: "Master Wei is here." Yuan You and the other guests went to the front of the hall to

welcome Wei Bi. He greeted Yuan You and then the others, and they all took their places. When they had finished their tea, the servants cleared away the cups.

Yuan You then invited everyone to move to the west parlor. "Let me lead the way," he said.

"Please do," they replied. As they followed him, they saw two white-painted side doors above which was a sky blue couplet. It read:

Bamboo music played by the wind;
Flower shadows moved by the moon.

Inside the doors was a large courtyard. Although the rocks were artificial, their cavities and outcroppings were distinctly pleasing to the eye. The courtyard also contained a few emerald *wutong* trees, several green bamboos, and also a dozen or more fruit trees—plums, apricots, peaches, and pomegranates. It was the fourth month, and the peonies on the flower terraces were in vivid bloom—a delightful sight. Above the south-facing parlor was a tablet of *nanmu*³ wood with an inscription in sky blue characters: "Singing of the wind, playing with the moon." Beneath it were the words "By the hand of Wang Yingxiong, style Guling."⁴

In the center of the room were a six-panel white-painted door screen, an incense table of *haimei*⁵ wood, and a large centerpiece painting. It was a landscape by Chen Yuan, style Junxi,⁶ flanked by two scrolls of gold-flecked paper:

Wind on the water's surface, a thousand layers of green;
Moon at heaven's center, a single sweep of blue.

Beneath it were two attributions: "Submitted to my elder, Master Peishan,⁷ for correction" and "Respectfully, from the hand of Huang Yingxiong, style Qizhi."⁸

To the left of the incense table was an antique crackleware vase with a stand of *haimei* wood set on a small square black-lacquered table. In the vase were a dozen corn poppies of various colors. To the right of the incense table was a marble whatnot with a large Western chiming clock in the center and, arranged on each side of it, two tall glass hand lanterns

with gold hooks and jade bands as well as a pair of painted hat stands. The tables, chairs, footrests, square stools, and teapoys were all of *haimei* wood. On the scholar's chairs and square stools were green woolen cushions with a pattern worked in red silk couching of the character *shou*.⁹

On each side of the incense table were Guangzhou pewter dishes resting on *haimei* stands. There were also eight bookcases of *nanmu* wood, four on each side of the incense table. They were fitted with white copper locks, so one could not see what books were inside. On the paneled¹⁰ wall to the left six paintings were hanging: a plum blossom by Monk Fang Hua,¹¹ a landscape by Yu Buqing,¹² a portrait of a beautiful woman by Wang Xiaomou,¹³ *The Last Month of Autumn*, by Li Mousheng,¹⁴ a picture of roses by Ni Yantian,¹⁵ and one of pomegranates by Liu Guzun.¹⁶ The veneered wall on the right held a horizontal scroll, "Rhapsody on the Palace of Qin," by the hand of Qian Wenshan.¹⁷ Against the veneered railings on the right was a banquet table of *nanmu* wood, on which were placed an antique vase of Longquan ware and a tall red sandalwood taboret. In the vase were five white peonies of an exquisite variety. Against the paneled wall at the back was a large platform bed of *nanmu* and a low table of *haimei*. On the bed were large green woolen bolsters and round pillows, and in front of it a footrest and a spittoon. From the ceiling hung six foreign-style lamps of Guangzhou pewter as well as square glass lamps in various sizes. With its carved railings and blinds of speckled bamboo, the room had a quiet and elegant air.

Yuan You asked everyone into the parlor for breakfast. A fresh pot of the finest scented tea was brewed, and four dishes were set out: fresh meat with bamboo shoot patties, ham and sticky-rice pies, buns filled with bean paste, and steamed crabmeat dumplings. After they had finished eating, they chatted idly as they sipped their tea.

Wu Zhen's page, Fazi, took a blue cloth bag over to the right side of the room and put it on the bed, moving the low *haimei* table off to one side. From the bag he produced a large pipe of speckled bamboo with a jadeite stem and gold mouthpiece and placed it on the bed. He also took out a little sandalwood box resembling a visiting-card case, opened it, and placed it in the middle of the bed as if it were a lamp saucer. The box contained a white copper opium lamp with a revolving top, a glass lamp cover, as well as a steel pick, a small pair of scissors, a pipe cleaner, and a dish of water.

When he had set out these items, he took out a pipe spill and lit it, then lit the opium lamp.

Noticing that the lamp was alight, Wu Zhen got up, walked over to the bed, and sat down. From an opium pouch at his waist that was done in needlepoint and had multicolored tassels he took a silver cloisonné opium case with a revolving top that had a lion rolling a ball on it; the lion's eyes and tongue turned, just like the ball. The case was said to have been made in Shanghai, this kind of work being beyond the capacity of the Yangzhou silversmiths.

Wu Zhen opened the case and set it in the lamp saucer, then invited his companions to smoke a pipe. They all said that they didn't smoke, but Wu Zhen kept on urging them until he succeeded in dragging Lu Shu over to the platform bed, where he lay down on the left side, with Wu Zhen on his right. Wu dipped the steel pick in the opium case and retrieved some opium, which he roasted over the lamp until it hung down an inch or more.¹⁸ Then, with a twist of the pick, he transferred the opium to the second finger of his left hand and rolled it into a tiny ball. Then he dipped the pick in the opium again, roasted it over the lamp, and also rolled it into a ball. After repeating the process several times, he rolled the balls into a pellet.

With the pipe in his hand in front of the lamp, he placed the pellet in the bowl, kneaded it with his fingers until it was wedged in tightly, then held it to the lamp and made a hole in it with the pick. After blowing through the pipe once himself, he wiped the mouthpiece with his hand and passed the pipe to Lu Shu. With Wu Zhen holding the end of the stem, Lu Shu clasped the pipe firmly in his teeth. Wu held the end of the stem to the lamp and told Lu Shu to inhale. Lu Shu did so, but he inhaled too hard, and the pipe became blocked. Once more Wu Zhen held the pipe stem to the lamp, roasting the opium into a pellet, and then, puncturing it once more with the pick, he handed it back to Lu Shu. This process had to be repeated several times, with Lu Shu failing to inhale and Wu Zhen roasting the opium again, until the former finally succeeded. He then handed the pipe back to Wu Zhen and remarked with a smile, "I'm no smoker, I'm afraid. Actually I found it rather unpleasant. But don't let that deter you. By all means go ahead and satisfy your habit."

Wu Zhen again offered the pipe to the others, but they all declined. In leisurely fashion he inhaled seven or eight times before asking Lu Shu to

change sides. He then inhaled another seven or eight times from the left side. By this time the table had been set for lunch in the library. Only after Yuan You had invited his guests to take their seats did Wu Zhen put down his pipe and get up together with Lu Shu.

After much polite sparring, it was determined that Lu Shu should occupy the place of honor and that Wei Bi and Jia Ming would occupy the second and third seats. Wu Zhen and Yuan You would sit opposite each other, with Wu in the senior position. The wine would be served by Yuan. At first twelve small dishes were set out, followed by four small bowls. Lu Shu was asked about the scenery in Suzhou and Changshu, and he in turn asked about Yangzhou's history and relics. They conversed casually over their wine, until five large dishes were brought in. Since they had already drunk several pots of All Flowers wine, they protested, "We can't drink any more in the middle of the day," and asked for rice to be served. Yuan You toasted each of them with a large cup of wine, after which four more small dishes were brought in. As the meal ended, servants handed them tightly rolled hot towels to wipe their faces with, and then the guests left the table to sit and drink tea. A separate lunch had been prepared for their pages, and Yuan You's servants now invited them to a side room to eat it. Wu Zhen lay down on the bed again and indulged himself another dozen times. When their pages had finished their lunch, he told Fazi to gather up the opium things and return the low table to the bed.

Yuan You then invited everyone back to the Futura for tea. The talk there was all of brothels and prostitutes, and they found themselves to be a remarkably congenial group. "Wenhua and Youying¹⁹ are sworn brothers already," volunteered Wei Bi. "The fact that all five of us have been thrown together like this can only be due to our destinies from a previous existence. At the risk of sounding a little presumptuous, I should like to propose that we hold a meeting and swear brotherhood with one another. I wonder if you gentlemen would do me the honor of attending?"

The others were aware that Wei Bi was the son of the candidate for the Lianghuai region, and since he wanted to swear brotherhood with them, they were more than willing to do so.

"Then let's take a boat out to the Emperor Guan Temple on Little Gold Hill²⁰ tomorrow and offer incense. We'll meet at first light in the Jinyuan noodle house on Progeny Street. Everything will be on me. We don't need

to make fools of ourselves by imitating those vulgar types who chip in together for their pig's head drinking parties. What do you say?" At first they were unwilling and politely demurred, but when they saw that Wei Bi was in earnest, they accepted.

As they finished their afternoon tea, Yuan You urged Lu Shu to come back for supper, but he firmly declined. "I need to speak to my uncle this evening. I'll expect to see you in the morning." Yuan You did not like to press the point. He told the waiter and the tobacco vendor to put the cost of the tea on his account, and then he and his guests left the teahouse and went their separate ways.

Early the following morning, Wei Bi gave an order to one of his servants: "Go down to the dock at Little East Gate and hire a large boat with a big awning. I'll be waiting to hear from you at the Jinyuan noodle house." The servant left on his errand.

Wei Bi was accompanied by his page, who carried under his arm a multicolored foreign-print canvas bag with a floral design and a jade green silk lining. It contained a sleeveless jacket of medium-blue satin lined with white pongee, a foreign-print apron, a little white copper wash basin, towels of Korean cloth, a spittoon of Guangzhou pewter, a register for the brotherhood ceremony, a writing brush, an inkstone, and so on. He also carried in his hand a blue cloth bag containing a white copper water pipe, a tobacco case, paper spills, and so forth. They left by the main gate of the compound and headed straight for the Jinyuan noodle house on Progeny Street.

If you wish to know what happened, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER FOUR

*Demanding payment of a loan, Yuan You creates a
disturbance in a noodle house;*

Displaying the power of office, Wei Bi impounds a pleasure boat.

Accompanied by his page with the canvas case and the water-pipe bag, Wei Bi left the compound and went along First Lane,¹ then turned east and continued on through Little East Gate until he came to the Jinyuan noodle house on Progeny Street, where in the inner room he was welcomed by the waiters. He picked out a large table in the center, while his page took himself off to the front room and set the two bags on one of the tables there. In the inner room a waiter approached Wei Bi's table, called out "Sir," wiped the table with a cloth, and poured him tea in a covered cup. "How many guests would you be expecting, sir?" he asked.

"There'll be five of us altogether," said Wei Bi. The waiter set out five pairs of chopsticks, ten or more paper mats, and eight or nine small dishes, then stood off to one side in readiness.

A few minutes later, Jia Ming and Yuan You came in and exchanged greetings with Wei Bi. Then, before they had even taken their seats, Lu Shu arrived, and the other three called him over. They sat down, and the waiter poured out three more cups of tea.

"Many thanks for your hospitality yesterday," the other guests said to Yuan You.

"Oh, not at all."

As they sat drinking their tea, Yuan You suddenly noticed someone

going upstairs and leapt to his feet, declaring, "I'm afraid I'll have to leave you for a moment. I'm going upstairs, but I'll be back soon."

Before long the others heard a table being pounded upstairs and Yuan You's voice raised in anger. Jia Ming promptly rushed up and found Yuan You in a quarrel with someone he knew, a man named Zheng Huan, style Guanzhi, who served as a clerk in the accounts department of the Salt Administration.

Yuan You and Zheng Huan both called out to him, and he joined them at their table and asked Yuan what the trouble was. "Last year, in the twelfth month," Yuan said, "Master Zheng was kind enough to ask me to arrange a loan of thirty taels discounted ten percent at three percent interest a month.² He undertook to pay the sum back at the end of the third month, but on the due date not only did he fail to pay, he went into hiding and kept giving me the slip. Time after time I dashed over to his place to pay my respects to his lordship, but each time the steward was ready with an excuse: either he had left the day before to spend the night with some mistress, or he hadn't returned from a banquet at some brothel or other. I've lost count of how many times I got up early in the morning to look for him, and I can't tell you how much sleep I've missed while chasing all over the city after this will-o'-the-wisp. I've worn out my shoes looking for him! Every day the lender quarrels with me, accusing me of cheating him out of his money. And now, by a great piece of luck, I run into Master Zheng and ask him for the money—and he *still* gives me the runaround! I tell you straight; if he has the money, well and good, but if he doesn't, I'm going to go down to the county yamen with him and start proceedings. I'll bring a little business to my friends among the runners. We'll soon see whether as broker I'm within the law or not."

Zheng Huan turned to Jia Ming. "Brother, let me tell you what happened. I used to be on good terms with Brother Yuan. More than once we've shared in the proceeds from a piece of business. Back in the twelfth month I was indeed obliged to him for arranging a loan of thirty taels. I expected to pay it back at the end of the third month, but there's a case of mine that hasn't yet come to hand, which is why I've put off repayment so far. It was my fault that he had to go back and forth several times without finding me in, and it's no wonder he's angry. I would just like to plead for an extension until the Dragon Boat Festival, when I'll pay back both principal and interest."

"I don't want to be cynical," said Yuan You, "but no matter what you do now, you will not be able to get by."

"But Brother Yuan!" exclaimed Jia Ming. "You started out on good terms with him, and now he just wants you to give him a few more days so that he can repay you in full. Why all this fuss over a few taels?"

"Brother Jia," said Yuan You, "you simply don't understand what I've had to put up with. The lender is another Jie or Zhou.³ If you borrow money from him for a three-month term and repay it just one day late, he's *very* unhappy. I knew my brothers would mock me, but business was slow, so I handled this loan for Master Zheng—all for a commission that will barely pay for my cup of tea! The lender's a man who always expects to get his way, and this debt of Master Zheng's has come as a shock to him. Even I am flabbergasted by it. As far as postponing repayment is concerned, that's out of the question. The loan will have to be turned over to another lender. Only if Master Zheng is prepared to put up with a little grief will he be able to get by."

"I'll do anything you suggest," said Zheng.

Yuan You continued. "There's just one solution: find another lender and borrow money from him, then pay back what you owe to this tyrant. Well, Master Zheng, what do you say to that?"

"Whatever you suggest."

"There's also one rather awkward matter that I have to bring up. You'll need to provide me with another document that I can use to find a new lender."

"Of course." He sent the waiter off to the stationer's for a sheet of lined document paper with a revenue stamp on it. The waiter also brought out a container of ink and an old writing brush and set them on the table.

Zheng Huan was about to start writing when Yuan You said, "Wait a moment, Brother. Let me do the calculations for you." He called to the waiter to bring him an abacus. As he worked, he supplied an explanation to Zheng Huan: "The original loan was for thirty taels, which is overdue by fifty days. You will need to accept a transfer fee of three taels. For the overdue period, let's make it two months instead of three; you'll have to pay one tael eighty in interest. Altogether, you'll need to repay fifty taels, of which five will be the discount, four fifty will be the interest for three months, one fifty will be the broker's fee, and another one fifty will be the cost of the silver, to which we must add another tael for checking its

quality. Clearing your debt completely comes to forty-eight taels thirty.⁴ That leaves just one tael seventy, and I'd be much obliged if I could have that for a new pair of shoes."

"By all means take it, Brother," said Zheng. Picking up the brush, he completed the document.

This certifies that the undersigned will pay fifty taels of the finest
grade of silver as weighed according to standard measure.

By the hand of year month day Zheng Guanzhi

Guarantor, Yuan Youying

Zheng signed beneath his name. "I have you to thank for this, Brother," he said.

"I'd better add my name to yours so I can give the paper to someone to line the bottom of his trunk with," said Yuan with a smile as he signed.

Zheng presented it to him. "Thank you for all you've done for me."

"I spoke out of turn just now," said Yuan as he took it. "But I can't begin to tell you how much harassment I've had to take from that lender, on top of which I've had to chase around after you for weeks on end. When I caught sight of you today, I was simply livid. I hope you'll forgive me for being so rude."

"Entirely my fault. I gave you a great deal of trouble. When the loan has been paid, I'll come and thank you again."

"We're friends, after all," said Yuan You. "We can dispense with the formalities." He took up the newly signed document and arranged to meet Zheng at the Futura teahouse on the following day, when he would return the thirty-tael promissory note that Zheng had signed before.

Zheng called for a waiter and gave orders to cook noodles for them, but Jia Ming and Yuan You intervened: "We have friends waiting for us downstairs. We need to leave you now."

Zheng Huan saw they could not be persuaded. He thanked Yuan You again and repeated his invitation: "If you can't do me the honor today, I hope you will do so some other time."

Jia Ming and Yuan You took their leave and went down to the courtyard, where they found Wei Bi talking to one of his servants. He appeared to be angry, and the servant was saying "Yes, sir, certainly, sir" as

he left. Jia and Yuan went back and sat down at their table, where Wei Bi joined them.

"This morning I sent a servant around to the dock at Little East Gate to hire a large boat," said Wei Bi, "and just now he came back and told me the man in charge was demanding a four-dollar commission for holding the *Peony Market* for us. My servant offered him two dollars, but the boatman said that if he wanted a boat for two dollars, he'd just have to stay there and occupy it himself. They got into an argument, and the boatman, with a crowd of others backing him up, was about to beat my man, so he came back and reported to me. I've just sent him to the family compound to get my father's card and take it over to the Ganquan county yamen, where he'll insist that they impound a big boat for us at the Little East Gate dock. Let's see if they dare to ignore *that*! What do you think, gentlemen, wasn't that a despicable thing to do?"

"These boatmen are like dogs that can never get enough," said Yuan You. "But when it comes to stocking up their own boats with provisions, they're like turtles that vanish beneath the waves."

At this point Wu Zhen finally bustled in, exchanged greetings with everyone, and took his seat. The waiter poured him a cup of tea. "How much did you smoke last night that you couldn't get up in time this morning?" asked Yuan You.

"I was afraid I might sleep in and miss our appointment, so I did take a bit more than usual last night, but I couldn't get to sleep. Then at dawn they brought us the news that my mother-in-law had passed away. Because I was going out with you gentlemen, I couldn't attend the laying in, so I went over and paid my respects before rushing on here. Unfortunately, I've arrived too late and held you up, for which I apologize."

"Never mind that! We're all famished, so let's start the noodles!" said Yuan You.

Wei Bi told the waiter to heat up a catty of sorghum liquor. He also ordered four fried dishes and five servings of the one-*qian* two-*fen*⁵ noodles, as well as five servings of the six-*fen* noodles for the servants in the outer room. After asking what topping they would like, the waiter went off to see to the noodles. Before long he was back with the liquor and set out five wine cups. Then he heated up a bowl of shredded bean curd in the finest soup. He brought out the dishes of fried food one by one, then served the

noodles to each of the guests. As they drank, they finished the noodles and then wiped their hands and faces.

While they were chatting over their tea, the servant who had reported to Wei Bi came back with a man wearing a red tasseled cap, a blue cotton gown, black cloth boots, and holding a black paper fan. The servant approached and stood at Wei Bi's elbow: "Sir, this is a messenger from the Ganquan county yamen," he said, pointing to the man. "I returned to the compound and took your father's card to the yamen, where I had a word with the men on the gate. They at once issued the order to impound and sent this man with me to the dock. A large boat, the *Fuchunyou*,⁶ is being held for you." Wei Bi nodded.

The messenger came forward and presented himself: "Sir!"

"Many thanks," said Wei Bi. "If you'll come along to the compound tomorrow, you'll receive a little something for your trouble." He told his servant to take the man to the outer room for some noodles.

"Well, the boat's been seen to," said Jia Ming. "But don't say we're going to be the only ones on board? That would be too dull for words. Why don't we get Brother Wu's favorite to join us for a little fun?"

"But she can't play or sing," said Wu Zhen. "It would be worse than having a deaf-mute on board. I've heard there's a new girl called Fragrance at the Jinyulou in the Scripture Repository⁷ outside Tianning Gate, and that she's outstanding in talent as well as looks. Why don't we invite her?"

"Great idea!" said the others. "When we're through the sluice gate, let's all go ashore at the Tianning dock and ask her."

After they had chatted a while longer, Wei Bi told his page to charge the noodles served at both tables to his account and then invited his companions to go to the dock. At Little East Gate they were hailed by the boatmen. The messenger from the yamen led them to the shore, where their boatman quickly rigged up a handrail. Wei Bi invited his guests to step up the gangway and take their seats in the cabin, while their pages either stood in the bow or sneaked off and hid in the stern. One of the boatmen confided to Wei Bi's page: "We don't provide tea, you know. Tell your master, and ask him if he wants us to buy him any tea, charcoal, or pastries."

The page reported this to Wei Bi, who told him to give several hundred cash to the boatman and ask him to buy those items, as well as large incense candles and a string of firecrackers. Before long the boatman returned with

the purchases and asked, "Are we waiting for anyone?" Wei Bi said they were all on board and gave the order to start, at which the boatman cast off and pulled up the gangway. The messenger from the yamen waited until the boat was under way before returning. I need not relate how the next day he and the boatman presented themselves at the Wu compound to collect their pay.

Inside the cabin Wei Bi turned to his companions. "I hesitate to put myself forward like this, but yesterday you were kind enough to accept my idea of forming a brotherhood. So let me ask each of you for the eight characters of your birth." He told the page to take the brotherhood register, brush, and inkstone from the canvas bag and place them on the table, then get some water to mix with the ink.

Each of them gave the date and time of his birth, which established an order of seniority. Jia Ming was the eldest, followed by Wu Zhen and then Yuan You. Lu Shu and Wei Bi were born in the same year, but the former was the elder by two months, and so he became the fourth brother and Wei Bi the fifth. Now that that question had been resolved, Wei Bi completed the register and put it on a shelf in the cabin, then had his page remove the writing materials.

By this time the boat had passed through the sluice. Wei Bi had the boatman pull in alongside the dock at Tianning Gate.⁸ He let down the gangway, and the passengers stepped ashore, climbed up the stone ramp, and walked past the Tianning Temple as far as the entrance of the Scripture Repository. Inset above the entrance was a tablet of white-sail rock on which the word "Monastery" had been inscribed in blue. Inside they found the front door of the Jinyulou open and went in with their pages, to be greeted by a servant with a cry of "Guests here!" The five men were invited upstairs, while their pages were asked to sit downstairs.

If you are wondering whether Fragrance was there, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER FIVE

*A brotherhood is formed on Little Gold Hill,
And a jade pendant is accepted in the Jinyulou.*

Wei Bi invited his friends to the Jinyulou, where the house steward led them upstairs and someone showed them into a room on the west side, pulling back the door curtain and asking them to be seated. After a servant had offered them tea, a woman of twenty-two or -three with unbound feet came in. Her hair was drawn up in a fashionable chignon and fastened with a rhinoceros horn pin. Inserted at an angle was a silver ear-pick hair-pin decorated with a soft-wing butterfly done in gilt and kingfisher feather. Above the butterfly's wings rose two quivering silver antennae topped with imitation pearls that trembled as she walked. She wore gilt and emerald earrings to which were attached three flattened-circle¹ pendants of white jade. She had an oval face with dense eyebrows and fine eyes. She was only lightly made up, and a scattering of freckles was faintly visible. She had on a bleached white silk tunic with a black, double-embroidered lute design on the breast, and over it a Suzhou-blue sleeveless jacket of Shanghai cotton lined with white imported cotton and decorated with a wide black satin border of hibiscus-style trim and fastened with gold cassia-bud buttons; a black imported cotton skirt; white water-crepe stockings; and shoes with four-section soles stitched in "skipping three needles" fashion in Falling on Cutoff Bridge style. The shoes were of jade green satin lined with pink nankeen, their black velvet sides decorated with pine, bamboo, and plum-tree images, and heel straps of crimson Shanghai

cotton embroidered with black silk thread and trimmed with white cassia-bud motifs. She also wore a blue apron. Her wrists bore twisted-thread silver bracelets. On the middle finger of her left hand she wore a milk white jade ring of water chestnut shape as well as two gilt interlocking rings. She was carrying a white copper container with which to replenish the supply of tobacco. The men observed that, although she might not be a perfect beauty, she looked both elegant and seductive, and they could not take their eyes off her.

Next two prostitutes came in and greeted the guests with a cry of "Gentlemen!" before sitting down on chairs beside the veneered door and asking the men's names and where they lived. The guests responded by asking them their names. One was Cloud, the other Lute, and both came from Yancheng and were twenty or twenty-one. Cloud was part of the management, Lute an employee.

As they chatted, the woman with unbound feet returned carrying a white copper water pipe that she fitted up for Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, Yuan You, and Wei Bi before coming to Lu Shu. He held the mouthpiece in his right hand, but when he tilted his head to smoke, he took a sideways glance at her—and completely forgot to inhale. As she blew on the paper spill, then bent over and held it to the bowl of the pipe, she saw him gazing at her and noted his youth, his handsome looks, and his brilliant clothes. She gazed back at him as if in a trance, forgetting to light the tobacco and allowing the spill to burn down most of the way. Jia Ming, who saw what was happening, cried out: "Watch out! You'll burn your hand!" Only then did the pair awaken to the danger and exchange a smile.

"Brother Lu, how much garlic did you bring with you?" asked Wei Bi. Not understanding the question, Lu Shu gave him a puzzled look.

"This is only your first visit here, gentlemen," said the woman, "and already you're making fun of us girls."

More puzzled than ever, Lu Shu pressed Wei Bi for an explanation. "What did you mean when you asked how much garlic I had brought with me?"

By this time the woman had finished filling the pipes and left the room. "You're not familiar with our Yangzhou idiom," said Wei Bi. "Women with unbound feet are called sturgeons, and one who's as pretty and charming as this girl is also known as a 'fresh catch.' When you started drooling

at the sight of her, weren't you bringing a lot of garlic here in hopes of eating sturgeon?"

Yuan You broke in. "Brother Lu, there's a fellow here in Yangzhou who's written a book called *Ninety-nine Bamboo Branch Songs of the Yangzhou Brothels*. Let me recite one for you:

I love her more than all the other girls;
With dainty hands she fills the pipe for me.
For a fine, rich sturgeon the price is high;
I must leave the steward a double fee.

"Oh, very good! Very good indeed!" chorused the other guests.

"With a woman like that on your staff, you could do a lot more business," Yuan You remarked to Cloud.

"You gentlemen shouldn't make fun of us country girls," she replied, calling to a servant, who brought in a lute.² As she adjusted the strings, she said, "I don't have a good voice, so you'll have to make allowances for me."

"Do give us a song," they said. She struck up the melody and sang a "Full River Red" tune:

Oh, my handsome love, ever since you left me,
Half out of my mind,
I've shed my tears in secret.
When evening comes,
I'm in despair, alone by the solitary lamp,
Then listlessly to bed.
But the bed is so huge
With its red silk coverlet
That I cannot sleep on my own.
The more I think of you, the sadder I become.

From afar I hear a wild goose cry,
But it brings no message for me.
In my chamber the water clock presses on,
But I toss and turn and cannot sleep.

Damn that stupid maid!
She asks why I'm still awake;
She doesn't know what pangs of love I suffer.
She asks why I'm still awake;
She doesn't know what pangs of love I suffer.

She finished the song to general applause. One servant relieved her of the lute, while another offered the guests tea. "I've heard you have a Miss Fragrance here," Yuan You said to Cloud. "Why don't you ask her to come out and talk to us?"

Cloud shouted to the woman with unbound feet: "Maid Zhang, call Miss Fragrance."

"Miss Fragrance! We have guests here. Come and join us," the woman called. After a short delay, a girl dressed as a boy pulled aside the door curtain and came in. The men saw that her hair was coiled in a queue fastened by a two- or three-ounce braid of the finest quality, the tassels of which hung down beside her right temple. She had four sprigs of roses in her hair, some thirty blossoms in all. Four hairpins were inserted at various angles, one of fine silver, gilt, and kingfisher feather and three ear-pick hairpins with silken pads depicting the Eight Treasures.³ She had two fine silver, gilt, and kingfisher feather earrings in a bamboo leaf design, from each of which hung three flattened-circle pendants of milk white polished jade. She wore a long, unlined gown with cassia-bud buttons and scalloped edges that had a round collar piece of imported crepe silk with numerous images of flowing clouds and flowers. It had a black satin border with gold couching depicting flowers of all seasons in dark blue as well as a yellow, green, and pale pink trim. Over it she wore a green wool sleeveless jacket with cassia-bud buttons that was lined with pink silk. Its round collar piece had a border of black satin depicting flowers of the four seasons embroidered in dark blue with gold couching and also a scalloped White Flag trim. She wore trousers of blue nankeen double stitched with jade green silk thread and a belt of pea green imported crepe edged with hibiscus-style trim in three colors; crimson imported crepe-silk over trousers lined with green nankeen and embroidered at the edges with dark blue lotus-picking images in gold couching and decorated with yellow, green, and White Flag and scalloped lute trim; white water-crepe stocking wrappers; a pair of

Falling on Cutoff Bridge-style tinkling wooden-soled shoes with soles in four sections, uppers of Beautiful Lady tribute satin depicting hibiscus and cassia in dark blue with gold couching, sides of white damask embroidered in the Gu style with multicolored West Lake scenes, and heel straps of apricot yellow imported crepe with embroidered satin. The openings of the shoes were in a Heavenly Twins design and had four fine silver foreign-engraved buttons attached to them and pale green imported crepe laces. The shoes were less than four inches long with straight soles and round heels. She had an oval face, gracefully arched eyebrows, and large eyes. She was romance personified, with a slender, willowy figure—so lovely and bewitching that no one could help falling under her spell.

With a radiant smile she greeted the guests and then, after taking a seat beside Lu Shu, began asking each of them his name and where he was from, after which they asked her the same questions. "My name is Fragrance," she said. "I'm fifteen and I come from Yancheng."

"Are you engaged?" asked Lu Shu.

She blushed. "No, not yet."

"You are well known for your beauty and talent," said Wei Bi, "and now that we've met, I can see why. I should like to ask you to sing for us. Would you be willing to?"

Before she could reply, Cloud had called for a lute. "She's still a child, and her singing talents are quite undeveloped," she said. "I hope you gentlemen won't laugh at her."

A servant came in with the lute and handed it to Fragrance. Adjusting the strings, she sang another "Full River Red" in a sweet, melodious voice:

Everyone loves you, my handsome lover,
 They love your dashing looks,
 Your graceful figure.
 Gazing at me, you start to smile,
 But your lips stay closed—
 You're not madly in love at all!
 Then out you come with a pair of jasmine flowers,
 Work them into a crablike shape,
 And place them on my head.

That idiot father of mine
 Takes me to task.
 The flowers are thrown in the dirt,
 And I'm not allowed to look at you.
 For you I'm sick with love.
 When can we two be together
 To settle our lovers' debts?
 When can we two be together
 To settle our lovers' debts?

As she finished, a servant relieved her of the lute. Impressed by her clear phrasing and winning ways, the guests broke into spontaneous applause.

"Our object in coming today was to invite Miss Fragrance to join us on a cruise. Would that be possible, do you suppose?"

"It's most generous of you," said Cloud. "Of course, she'll be only too happy to attend on you. Where are you moored?"

"At the dock here," said Wu Zhen. "We can walk down there together."

"Hurry up and get yourself ready," said Cloud to Fragrance. "You're going on a cruise with these gentlemen. See you attend on them nicely." She also asked: "Are both musicians in the house?"

"They're both here, ready and waiting," came a voice from downstairs.

Fragrance stood up. "Gentlemen, if you'll excuse me for a moment . . ."

"By all means," they said. "But be as quick as you can. We'll be waiting for you."

As she went out, Fragrance peeped at Lu Shu out of the corner of her eye and gave him a slight smile. Back in her room she touched up her makeup with a powder puff and dabbed a little rouge on her lips. Then she changed into a new gown triple stitched with gilt cassia-bud buttons. It had a round collar piece of greenish blue imported crepe in an Eight Treasures design and black satin borders embroidered all around in a variety of colors, with gold couching of figures and scenes from *The Story of the Stone* and yellow, green, and pale pink trim. Over it she wore a formal jacket of deep blue, shiny imported camlet with gold-plated cassia-bud buttons and a lining of scalloped pale pink damask panels. It had a round collar piece and a border of white satin embroidered with dark blue as well as

gold couching of the squirrel stealing the grapes and cut-in free-form cloud shapes, and a silver and gold trim. From the top button of the jacket hung a green eel-skeleton pendant, an emerald ring, an antique gold coin, two jade green swallows made of eel skeleton, in whose tails were cherry-apple designs of gold and kingfisher feather inset with crimson gems. From the tails hung tassels on which were depicted five-petal magnolia flowers in gold plate and layered green. They supported two eggplant-shaped blue-green ivory seal pendants with two threads holding one hundred and eight balsam beads from the Genuine Daichunlin shop, each with finely carved spherical *shou* characters. Also hanging from the button was an emerald dragon flattened-circle pendant fastened to a small fine-silver pendant from which dangled a silver filigree good luck medallion. From it hung twelve short silver threads holding a full set of twelve fine-silver foreign-engraved imperial toothpicks.

On her wrists she wore gilt filigree tortoiseshell bracelets engraved with the Eight Treasures. Her right thumb was fitted with a false nail made of tortoiseshell. On her middle finger she wore a silver and gilt foreign-engraved linked ring from which dangled three little bells in the shape of fish attached by short gilt and silver threads; they shook with her every movement. The middle and little fingers of her left hand were fitted with nail guards about two inches long made of foreign-engraved silver. Her middle finger also bore a saddle-shaped crimson carnelian ring and two silver and gilt interlocking rings.

After she had finished dressing, she used the commode, then washed her hands and with her right hand picked up a genuine ebony fan with a hundred *shou* characters inlaid in silver on its frame. On one side of the sheer white covering was the *Huizhenji*⁴ story in microscopic characters as written by a famous contemporary, and on the other side the scene of the drunken Shi Xiangyun sleeping in a bed of peonies.⁵ On the handle were silver dragons rampant in the form of the *shou* character, and at the end a small silver knob with a green silk cord attached to it and two gold and crimson tassels holding a pure white finely polished jade pendant depicting mandarin ducks playing among lotus flowers. In her left hand she carried a crimson imported crepe handkerchief depicting in dark blue with gold couching a scene of phoenixes flying through peonies. Returning to Cloud's room, which was opposite hers, she said to the

guests, "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. Shall we go?" They rose to their feet and went out.

"We hope you won't ignore our humble establishment after your cruise is over," said Cloud and Lute. "Do come back and enjoy yourselves with us."

"We'll bring Miss Fragrance back here before very long," they said. "We'll come and impose on you some other day."

As they were going downstairs, Cloud and Lute leaned over the banisters and urged them to come back soon. They promised to do so and, with their pages in attendance, left by the main entrance of the Jinyulou.

Lu Shu took Fragrance's hand and walked beside her. At the dock he helped her down the stone ramp and along the gangway onto the boat, while the others boarded with their pages. The servant who had accompanied Fragrance and the two musicians (one for operatic arias, the other for popular songs) also boarded. They placed a multicolored genuine imported cloth lute bag lined with pale rose nankeen on the table in the cabin. The servant and the musicians went up to the bow to sit while Jia Ming and the others took seats in the cabin and gave the order to cast off. Fragrance's servant came back to the cabin and offered everyone tea, then opened the bag, took out the lute, and placed it on the table. Its highly polished black front bore the words "Peace, Prosperity, High Honors" inlaid in mother-of-pearl, and the back had four *haimei* elbow joints in the shape of tuberoses. The servant then took the bag back to the bow with him. The boatman promptly cast off and used his pole to get the boat under way.

Fragrance picked up the lute, adjusted the strings, and said, "I don't have a good voice. Please don't be too critical."

"We look forward to hearing you," they replied.

She sang a "Played and Lost":

The Naiad's House with its red silk windowpanes.⁶

The Naiad's House with its red silk windowpanes.

Oh, dear!

The parrot before the curtain calls on her to rise.

Sad at heart!

A despondent Lin Daiyu

Leans upon the rail,
Upon the rail.

Little Aroma, with something in her hand;
Little Aroma, with something in her hand.
Oh, joy!
A note with a few brief lines.
"Miss! Oh, Miss!
On Baoyu's orders
I've come up here especially
To call on you."

While she was singing, the boat had progressed as far as Lower Commerce Street. The numerous teahouses along the street were full of customers who, on hearing the sound of music and song, turned their heads toward the river and tried to make out who was in the cabin. The passengers, however, because they were in the company of a prostitute, feared that the people in the teahouses might recognize them and call out, so they turned their heads in the opposite direction and stared at the city wall. The boat passed under the drawbridge at North Gate, where the tolling of the bells from the towers of the Buddhist temples was clearly audible. As they passed the Prajna Temple, Fragrance's song came to an end, and she laid the lute down to a round of applause. "That truly was a 'song that sprang from Beauty's lips!'"⁷ exclaimed Lu Shu. "Oh, Miss Fragrance, not only was your voice soft and gentle and every word as clear as a bell, the song itself was fresh and lively. What a thrill it was to hear you!" The others looked at Lu Shu and Fragrance and smiled to themselves.

In the face of a headwind, the boat made slow progress. The passengers' eyes turned to the barren hills on the north side, which presented a bleak and desolate sight. "I can remember when the Dou Lao Palace, the Wang Garden, the Little Rainbow Garden, the Sunset Glow Demitower, the Rolling Rocks Pleasance, the West Garden with Winding Stream, and the Rainbow Bridge Lustration Site were still in existence," said Jia Ming. "Now their pavilions and terraces have all been torn down and the whole place turned into an abandoned graveyard. There's a poem in *Bamboo Branch Songs on the Lake at Yangzhou* that makes you think back and heave a sigh:

I recall as a child how we hired a boat
And saw miles of gardens fine and tranquil.
Ruined graveyards are all you see now;
By grasses forlorn the river runs still."

"When I read *The Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou*," said Lu Shu, "I had the constant impression your city was full of beautiful scenery. I certainly never expected to find devastation of this sort. It just goes to show that it's better to see something with your own eyes than to read about it."

"Even a dozen years ago many of the gardens and pavilions were still in existence," said Jia Ming. "There was nothing like the devastation you see now."

As they were talking, the boat cleared Rainbow Bridge. Wei Bi told the boatman to head first for Little Gold Hill, which he did, poling vigorously ahead. Arriving at the dock, he drew alongside, tied up, and let down the gangway to allow his passengers to disembark. Wei Bi's page brought the incense and candles, the fireworks and the brotherhood register, and followed his master into the main gate of the Emperor Guan Temple and as far as the Great Hall. An acolyte was waiting there to insert the incense and light the candles. Wei Bi placed the register on the altar next to the censer and invited Jia Ming to kowtow before it, while bells and drums sounded on each side. After he had taken his oath, each of the others followed in turn. Wei Bi then picked up the register and handed it around among his companions. Lu Shu also invited Fragrance to come up and do reverence before the god's image.

The acolyte burned the paper offerings and set off the fireworks, and a priest came forward to greet and congratulate the visitors. Wei Bi paid for the cost of the service and also gave a hundred cash to the acolyte. The priest thanked him and invited the visitors to take seats in the hall, where the acolyte poured tea in covered teacups and offered one to each of them. There was also a tobacco vendor who came up and filled the water pipe. Wei Bi played dice with a vendor and won a number of Water Mice⁸ from the man's basket of prizes.

When Wei Bi had paid for the tea and tobacco, he and the others wandered about admiring the scene. After looking at the peonies, they came to Everspring Peak, which, when viewed from its base, appeared to be very

steep. Fragrance was afraid to go up, but Lu Shu took her hand and, side by side, they made their way to the top, where they found the temples of Three Branch Canal and Pagoda Bend spread out below them.⁹ The visitors rested in the pavilion on the summit and then went down again to the boat, by which time it was past noon. Wei Bi told the boatman to take them to the east side of Rainbow Bridge and tie up.

Once ashore, they walked to the Dexiongju restaurant, where Wei Bi chose a large table at the back and invited his companions to take their seats. This time Jia Ming was given the seat of honor, while the others sat in order of seniority, with Fragrance opposite Wei Bi at the bottom of the table. The pages, Fragrance's servant, and the two musicians sat at a separate table in the outer room. The proprietress, Mistress Wang, a woman in her fifties, came over to them. "Well, gentlemen," she said, "what would you like?"

"You choose," said Wei Bi to Jia Ming.

"Now that we're sworn brothers, we'll be spending a lot of time in each other's company, and we oughtn't to bother with all these conventions. We'll only enjoy ourselves if each of us orders what he likes."

After politely deferring to each other for some time, they settled on an order. It consisted of plates of large melon seeds, water chestnuts, hot ham in thick slices, Korean beef, fried beets, shrimps in soy sauce, fried kidneys, and fried chicken feet; a bowl of ham and boiled greens; dishes of bamboo shoots, roast pork, and steamed chicken; and a bowl of boiled black mullet. Fragrance also ordered fried noodles in meat sauce. First they ordered two catties of All Flowers wine. The waiter set out cups, chopsticks, and hors d'oeuvres, then brought out the various courses one by one. They played guess-fingers, and Fragrance lost three times to Lu Shu but pleaded with him to set her some lesser penalty than drinking a cup of wine.

"For the first loss I'll drink in your place," said Lu Shu, suiting his action to the word. "For the second loss you can please yourself."

"Thank you."

"But for the third loss, I'd like you to sing us a popular song." Fragrance handed over the counter,¹⁰ and someone brought her the lute. She adjusted it and then sang a "Played and Lost":

Snowy Rushes, where the steps are covered in snow.

Snowy Rushes, where the steps are covered in snow.

Aiya!

All the Red Chamber maidens are here!

What joy!

Baoyu in his cape stands at the Green Bower,

The Green Bower door.

A crystal vase clutched in his arms,

A crystal vase clutched in his arms.

Aiya!

A gentle rap, the door is open.

"Oh, good!"

I hope the Fairy Maid will pity me and break off a branch,

A branch of plum blossom."¹¹

As she finished, her audience applauded, and each of them drank a cup of wine in celebration before returning to the game. Again Fragrance lost, this time to Jia Ming, and he declared that as a penalty she should sing an operatic aria. The musician was called in, and he struck up the melody on his flute. Fragrance sang the song "Turquoise Phoenix Feathers,"¹² which caused the people at the nearby tables to turn their heads and look at her. Again her hosts applauded and drank up in celebration before resuming their guess-fingers games and boisterous drinking. Fragrance called the other musician to sit beside her and play the fiddle, commonly known as the *erhu*.¹³ She sang a suite of Erhuang music,¹⁴ after which they had their lunch and wiped their hands and faces. Fragrance paid a visit to Mistress Wang's room, and Wei Bi's page asked Wang to make out the bill.

Wei Bi then invited everyone back on board. By this time a number of other pleasure boats were out on the water, and the air rang with music and song, while gorgeously dressed women were everywhere to be seen. Wu Zhen lit the opium lamp in the cabin, and Fragrance prepared the opium for him. The boat took them on a tour of Peach Blossom Temple, Fahai Temple, Pingshan Hall, and the Chiwu Building. In each place they admired the peonies, their red and white colors mingling together and vying with each other in brilliance. Fragrance broke off a few sprigs of

spring-in-the-jade-palace¹⁵ and brought them back to the boat. They lit the paper spills meant for their water pipes and set off the many Water Mice that they had won. They had afternoon tea and continued their tour until evening, then told the boatman to return to the dock at Tianning Gate, where he moored the boat and let down the gangway. Wei Bi's page told the boatman to call at the family compound the next morning to collect his pay, and Wei Bi himself invited everyone ashore, while the boatman poled his empty boat back to the dock at Little East Gate.

The men accompanied Fragrance back to the Jinyulou, where she took them upstairs and showed them into her room. They observed how immaculate it was and noticed on the paneled walls four paintings of beautiful women as well as a pair of calligraphic scrolls on pink betel paper:

The moon¹⁶ palace bars the entry of mere mortals;
Fragrance clings to the garments of the great scholar.

The first line of the attribution read: "Playfully composed by the courtesan Fragrance." The second line read: "Written and presented by the Flower Lover."

Fragrance invited them to sit down. The woman with unbound feet served them tea and filled their pipes, and Cloud and Lute came in to keep them company. Having heard Cloud call the woman with unbound feet by her name, Wu Zhen addressed her the same way: "Maid Zhang, light a lamp for me, would you?" She arranged a small mat on Fragrance's bed and did so. Wu Zhen then took his opium case from his pocket and lay down on the bed, while Lute hurried over to help him start. Meanwhile Wei Bi ordered wine to be served.

A servant came in and addressed them: "There are five of you gentlemen, and we have only three courtesans in the house. Would you like us to call two more from some other house, or will three be sufficient?"

"We'll make do with three," said Jia Ming. "But do hurry up and serve the food. We need to get back into town."¹⁷

Lu Shu and Fragrance were sitting on a couch together. He asked about her family. "My parents died when I was very young," she said, "and I have no brothers or sisters, only an uncle, who brought me up and taught me to sing opera and popular song. The year before last he indentured me to a

house in Qingjiang and for two years received a great deal of money over and above my private savings and expenditure on clothes. This year he brought me here to Yangzhou, where I'm also indentured. I've been here a little over a month." Lu Shu sighed, overcome with pity.

Before long the table was brought out and set for dinner. Wu Zhen, who was still on the bed smoking opium, was invited by Cloud to join them. The others added their voices to hers, and eventually he put down his pipe and got to his feet.

Again they took their seats in order of seniority. As the youngest brother and also the host, Wei Bi sat at one end with Lute beside him. Cloud and Fragrance sat on the opposite side. Lu Shu's place, fourth in order of seniority, was very close to Fragrance's. Once they were seated, the three courtesans took turns offering wine, fruit, games of guess-fingers, dishes of food, and popular songs. So intent on their merry-making were the others that they never noticed the loving glances that passed between Fragrance and Lu Shu, or the play of hands and feet under the table, signs of an increasingly passionate relationship. Lu Shu undid a fine white-jade pendant in the shape of a carriage wheel that he wore at his waist—the wheel, which was free and could turn on its axle, was of exquisite workmanship—and surreptitiously passed it to Fragrance, who tucked it away. Then they played guess-fingers, and she lost again and begged for a lighter penalty. He sentenced her to perform a "Lovers' Rendezvous"¹⁸ for the guests. She put up a counter and rose to do so, summoning a musician to accompany her on the flute. She picked up a crimson crepe-silk handkerchief embroidered with pictures in gold couching of dark blue butterflies sporting among the flowers and began to sing in a melodious voice, "Mistress, O mistress, how lovely she is." When she came to the line "Oh, who will discharge my senseless debt of love?" with her left hand thrust inside her lapel she bent forward and scratched furiously at her head with an ear-pick hairpin, all the while looking out of the corner of her eye at Lu Shu. The sheer wantonness of her pose was more than words could capture.

By this time Lu Shu was in a state of delirium, his soul completely in thrall. Fragrance finished her song to general applause, returned to her seat, and canceled the counter. The guests celebrated her singing by drinking another round. With their long experience of the brothel scene, they

realized that Lu Shu and Fragrance had fallen in love, and Jia Ming said to Cloud, "Today we'll serve as matchmakers for your Miss Fragrance and our Master Lu."

"I appreciate the generous thought," Cloud replied, "but there are some details that I need to point out."

If you are wondering what she told him, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER SIX

Lu Shu considers marriage to a prostitute;

Wu Zhen arranges dinner at a brothel.

When Cloud heard Jia Ming offer to serve as matchmaker, she replied, "I appreciate the generous thought. It's all one might hope for, and I couldn't possibly refuse. There's just one problem, though. Fragrance is still a virgin, and although she has lost her parents, her uncle expects to make a fortune out of her, which is why matters have dragged on until now. Since Master Lu has taken a liking to her, he should first cultivate her friendship and then talk things over with the uncle. After that, congratulations would be in order."

"Excellent!" said Jia Ming. He told Fragrance and Lu Shu to drink a pledging cup to confirm their friendship. Everyone drank a toast to congratulate the couple, after which they played several rounds of guess-fingers. Cloud and Lute each sang two popular songs, and Fragrance sang a "Floating Gossamer," after which the party came to an end. Wu Zhen went off to smoke some more opium, while Lu Shu and Fragrance expressed their love with an even greater ardor. The other guests then persuaded Wu Zhen to finish his smoking and accompany them downstairs. The courtesans saw them as far as the landing and leaned over the railing to watch them leave. Fragrance pressed Lu Shu to come earlier the following day, which he promised to do. By this time the pages had already lit their torches to guide their masters home. After leaving the Jinyulou, they went through the Tianning Gate and as far as the crossroads, where

they separated after arranging to meet at the Futura teahouse the following morning.

Lu Shu returned to his uncle's house, where he sat musing in the study. Fragrance is a real beauty, he thought, and she has the most charming ways about her. My purpose in coming to Yangzhou was to buy a concubine, and now that I've met this enchanting girl, there's no point in looking any further. Unfortunately, though, she's fallen into prostitution, and because of her beauty and talent, it will no doubt cost the earth to buy her out. I think I'd better have a word with Brother Jia tomorrow. I need to find some way to bring this off if I'm ever to gain my heart's desire. He lay down on his bed, but with tumultuous thoughts such as these running through his mind, he tossed and turned and never did get to sleep.

Early the next morning he hurriedly arose and washed, then headed for the Futura accompanied by Felix. He found Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, and Wei Bi already there. After thanking Wei Bi for his hospitality of the day before, he greeted the others and sat down and drank his tea. Yuan You came in to join them with a young man of about twenty who was wearing cotton clothes, shoes, and socks. The others stood up to call them over. Returning their greetings, Yuan said to his companion, "These four gentlemen are sworn brothers of mine. Come over and pay your respects." Blushing furiously, the young man bowed before them.

"Who is he?" Jia Ming asked.

"He's a cousin of mine who came to visit us yesterday." The others promptly returned the young man's greeting and invited him to join their table. The waiter poured two more cups of tea.

The others asked the newcomer his name and where he was from. "My name is Mu Zhu," he replied. "When I was a little boy, my teacher gave me the style Ouren. We live at the south end of Huo Family Bridge." Pointing to Yuan You, he continued, "He's my cousin, and I'm his cousin. I'm getting married, and my father has sent me to Yangzhou to buy some odds and ends. I arrived yesterday, and I'm staying at my cousin's house." From this speech the others concluded that he was a country bumpkin and did not pursue the discussion any further.

"Would you gentlemen be kind enough to come to my mistress's place in Qiang Da's house on Ninth Street for an all-day celebration?" asked

Wu Zhen. "I do hope you'll honor me with your presence." Jia Ming, Yuan You, and Wei Bi were happy to accept.

Lu Shu had been planning to host them all at the Jinyulou, but when they accepted Wu Zhen's invitation, he could hardly do so and instead accepted the invitation himself. Turning to Jia Ming, he said, "There's something troubling me, and I'd like to ask you for your advice. I've been married for three years without having a child. Since I'm an only son, my father is eager for me to produce a grandson, and he sent me to Yangzhou not just to see my aunt but also to find a concubine. Yesterday I found out that Fragrance is still a virgin. What I should like to do is to take her out of the brothel and bring her home with me to relieve my father's concerns. I hope I can count on you and the others for help in deciding how to go about it? If it can be arranged, I shall be deeply grateful."

Jia Ming turned to the others. "You see what a prophet I was yesterday?"

"If this can be worked out, it will truly be a match of the brilliant and the beautiful, which is one of the most gratifying things in the whole world," said Wu Zhen. "You must do your level best to help him."

"Courtesans are always rare merchandise in the eyes of their families," said Jia Ming. "And on top of that, Fragrance has such talent and beauty, and she's still a virgin—why, she's a regular money tree! They'll never let her go for anything less than a fortune. I don't need to repeat what Cloud told us yesterday. In my opinion, Brother Lu ought not to be too hasty about this. The first thing is to win Fragrance over with a series of small favors. Brother Lu is such a handsome young fellow, how could she fail to be attracted? He ought to wait until they're in love and her heart belongs to him. I understand her only relative is an uncle. If Brother Lu lays out two or three hundred taels, and we do some quiet matchmaking with Fragrance, we're bound to succeed." The others chorused their approval.

When they had finished their breakfast, Yuan You said to Mu Zhu, "Let me take you back now. There's some business I need to see to today, and I won't be able to keep you company."

Mu Zhu stood up to go, but Wu Zhen held him back and said to Yuan You, "I don't mean to criticize, Brother, but since he's a relative of yours, why shouldn't we entertain him? What harm would there be in bringing him with us?"

"You don't understand," said Yuan You. "That isn't the sort of place we should be taking him to."

Wu Zhen insisted, however, and after settling the bill, he took Mu Zhu's arm and led him and the others out of the back door of the teahouse, along Paragon Street, around into North Willow Lane as far as Tianshou Temple, then down the South Spur landing to the moat. They crossed over by ferry and walked through one of the gaps in the wall to a house on Ninth Lane.¹

After Wu Zhen had invited them inside, they found themselves in a large reception room, behind which were five or six side rooms. Greeted by servants, they were shown into a room on the east side. It had a speckled-bamboo door screen, embroidered bedding, and a brocaded coverlet, as well as furnishings in the finest taste. On the paneled walls hung four paintings of beautiful women as well as a pair of scrolls on green wax paper:

The cassia tree's fragrance spreads further yet in the breeze;
The forest flowers' colors seem lovelier still in the sunlight.

The first line of the attribution read, "Elegantly composed by the courtesan Cassia." The second read, "Written by the Guardian-of-Flowers Immortal."

There was a prostitute in the room when they arrived, a girl of seventeen or eighteen who had put her hair up but had not yet washed her face. She had slender eyebrows and sparkling eyes. She wore a white imported cotton robe with an embroidered collar piece; on top of it a green woolen padded sleeveless jacket lined with pale pink silk and possessing an embroidered collar piece; crimson imported-crepe lined over trousers; blue nankeen trousers; and a jade green foreign crepe belt with an embroidered hem, from one side of which hung two silver bells and a crimson purse. She had not yet put a skirt on. On her feet, which were four inches long, she wore white water-crepe stocking wrappers and wooden-soled shoes of which the uppers were dark blue embroidered with bright yellow satin. She had merely slipped into her shoes, which were not yet laced up. On her wrists she wore bracelets of silver filigree. Although hardly beautiful, she had a certain charm that was distinctly pleasing. She had been sitting at her veneered dressing table, silently brooding over something, when the six men came into her room, and she sprang to her feet to welcome them. "Gentlemen," she said, "all five of you, please sit down."

"Why do you say five when there are six of us?" said Yuan You impulsively. "I take it you're Brother Wu's mistress?"

Wu Zhen smiled but said nothing.

Yuan You went on. "I still haven't asked you your name."

"Her name is Cassia," said Wu Zhen.

Cassia asked each of the guests his name, by which time an elderly maid had served them tea and filled the water pipe. Cassia told her to light the lamp so that Wu Zhen could smoke his opium, then turned to him. "You haven't been here in days. I sent someone out every day to invite you, but you never deigned to set foot here. I wonder what fair wind has blown you to our humble establishment today?"

Wu Zhen pointed at Lu Shu. "Brother Lu here is on his first visit to Yangzhou, and the last couple of days we've been showing him around. That's why I've not been to see you."

"What a pack of lies! But I've no time to argue with you now—I need to have my wash. Later on, when I get you on your own, I shall have a score to settle with you." She called out to the maid to bring her the water for washing.

At this point two more prostitutes came into the room. One was twenty-one or -two, with a chignon in the Suzhou Drop style held with a green bone double-headed hairpin. She had not yet put any flowers in her hair. She had a round face, arched eyebrows, and large, circular eyes. Her complexion showed faint traces of pockmarks, which were endearing rather than otherwise. She had two deep dimples and sparkling white teeth. On her ears she wore a pair of earrings that were between white and yellow, to which were attached a pair of imitation-jade pendants. She had on a worn white nankeen gown with a collar piece embroidered in jade green thread; on top of it an equally worn Suzhou-blue sleeveless jacket lined with white cotton; and a skirt of black imported cotton that offered a glimpse of jade green imported crepe over trousers. On her feet, which were less than four inches long, she wore a pair of white cotton stocking wrappers and wooden straight-soled and round-heeled shoes of import-blue cloth embroidered in fine white wool with images of butterflies flying among trees. The laces of the shoes were of greenish blue imported crepe. She wore no bracelets on her wrists. Although she was dressed only in cotton cloth, the simplicity of her makeup and the

elegance of her demeanor set her apart from the typical prostitute with her crude vulgarity.

Her companion, who looked about twenty, also had a Suzhou Drop that was fastened with a gilt hairpin, to which was attached a gilt double-*ruyi*² symbol holding two roses. The rest of her hair was brushed into a Liu Hai hoop. She had an oval face, fine eyes and eyebrows, and brownish teeth. On each ear she wore three white-jade flattened-circle pendants. On her slender figure she wore a bleached white pongee gown with a collar piece embroidered in black silk; on top of it a jade green imported silk sleeveless jacket lined with pink silk and possessing a collar piece embroidered in black satin thread; a pleated skirt of black imported crepe; and pink imported-crepe over trousers. On her feet, which measured a little over five inches, she wore white water-crepe cotton stocking wrappers and wooden-soled shoes with white imported crepe uppers embroidered with flowers in many colors, openings decorated with symbols of goodwill, and laces of crimson imported crepe. On her wrists she wore foreign-engraved silver bracelets that were round on the outside and square on the inside.

On entering the room, they greeted the guests in unison, "Gentlemen, Brother-in-Law!" then took seats near the veneered door and asked the guests their names, where they were from, and what work they did.

"We haven't yet asked you your particulars," said Jia Ming.

The girl in the Suzhou-blue jacket said, "My style is Phoenix, and I'm twenty-one. I was born in Yangzhou, but from the time I was a child I lived in Qingjiang. I've only been back in Yangzhou for less than half a month."

The girl in the jade green jacket said, "My style is Lucky, and I'm fifteen. I'm from Yancheng."

As they said this, a tinkling of bells was heard outside the door and in walked another prostitute of about sixteen or seventeen. Her hair was drawn back in an ingot-style chignon, in which she wore a gold hairpin and a gold *ruyi*. A gilt and kingfisher feather toothpick hairpin with a phoenix flying toward the sun motif was inserted at an angle in her hair; a rose hoop held two roses; and two more roses were inserted at an angle. She had a round, rather chubby face, and the rest of her hair was brushed into a fringe of curls. She had long, arched eyebrows and almond eyes. Two silver enamel patches adhered to her cheeks.³ She had a plump figure. She was

wearing a pink nankeen gown with a collar piece embroidered in a large stitch with black satin thread, and over it a sleeveless jacket of purple-red wool lined with jade green silk panels and possessing an embroidered collar piece; a Moon Palace skirt of multicolored imported crepe; and crimson over trousers of foreign crepe. Two small gold bells and a crimson purse hung down beside her skirt. On her feet, which measured four and a half inches, she wore white imported cotton stocking wrappers and wooden-soled shoes with dark blue uppers embroidered with pink satin and silver openings with bat motifs⁴ and crimson imported-crepe laces. On her wrists she wore tortoiseshell and gold filigree bracelets inset with symbols representing the Eight Treasures. On the fourth finger of her left hand she wore a red-gold hoop-style ring.

She entered the room with a broad smile on her face and greeted the guests with a "Five gentlemen," then walked over and sat down beside the bed. "Master Wu! By not coming here the last few days, you've almost driven Sister Cassia to her death. I heard someone say the other day that you had a little unfinished business somewhere else."

"Enough of that!" said Wu Zhen. "I've just been ragged by her. The last thing I need is a red-hot girl like you laying it on."

The others began laughing and asked the girl her particulars. "My style is Paria," she said. "I'm seventeen and I come from Yancheng." At this point, Phoenix and Lucky got to their feet and, after urging the guests to stay, left the room.

After a few inhalations of opium, Wu Zhen said to Cassia, "Call Sanzi in." She told the maid to go and call him. The man who now walked in and stood respectfully by the door was in his early twenties. After he had greeted the guests, Wu Zhen turned to Mu Zhu and asked him, "Which one of those girls do you fancy? Later on she'll keep you company."

Mu Zhu's face turned scarlet, and he said nothing. Wu Zhen winked at Sanzi. "Master Mu isn't saying anything, which must mean that none of your courtesans meets with his approval. Go to some other house and find him a good one. Then go on to the Jinyulou in the Scripture Repository and invite Miss Fragrance over. Tell her Master Lu is here."

"Brother, there's no need to invite her," put in Lu Shu.

"But you won't enjoy yourself unless she's here. You'll be too distracted."

"Now you're making fun of me again."

Wu Zhen turned back to Sanzi. "For lunch, order us eight plates and four dishes, and for dinner two more dishes and four small bowls. Get them from a large restaurant. First and foremost the food has to be good; I don't want any of your standard house fare. These five gentlemen are here today at my special invitation. Tell your staff to give them the best possible treatment and not neglect them in any way." Sanzi left on his various errands.

Meanwhile Cassia had washed and combed herself, put on her rings, and inserted two roses in her hair. She now wore a skirt and had her shoes properly laced. Lying down on the bed beside Wu Zhen, she satisfied her opium habit.

The other guests bantered with Paria to the accompaniment of much laughter, but Mu Zhu drew Yuan You out into the courtyard and said, "Cousin, just now you were sitting beside that woman and cracking jokes with her. If her parents or husband or brothers caught you doing that, it'd be no laughing matter! Please let me go home."

Yuan smiled. "Don't be afraid, Cousin," he said. "Even if we do have a little fun with her, she's a courtesan. Anyway, you have me here with you."

"You're my cousin, and I'm your cousin. Now you tell me that she's a cousin, too.⁵ I simply don't understand that relationship." Yuan You couldn't help laughing, but he didn't like to deride his cousin. He pulled Mu Zhu back inside and sat him down.

Outside the room someone was heard calling out, "Oh, there you are, Miss Wenlan. Come in and take a seat." The door curtain opened, and in came a prostitute of twenty-six or -seven. She had a coarse complexion covered in freckles that she had powdered heavily, leaving her face with a smooth, pallid look. She wore a blue-green imported cotton gown and a black imported cotton skirt. On her feet, which measured something over six inches, she wore imported cloth shoes with small soles and large uppers, rendering her completely dependent on the strength of the laces. On coming in, she called out "Gentlemen!" and then greeted Cassia and Paria. Cassia asked her to take a seat. Apart from Yuan You, none of the guests knew her, and they asked her particulars. "You *really* don't know her, Brother?" Yuan You asked Jia Ming. "Her name is Wenlan, and she comes from Xinghua. She's now at the Qingzi house beside the landing on Seventh Lane. I went there once with a few fellows for an introductory tea

party. There were four or five women present, but Miss Wenlan stood out among them. Even if she gets cross with me for saying it, the others were a bunch of gorgons, too hideous for words. I've heard a lover of hers say that she keeps the best bed in town!"

"I remember your face, sir, but not your name," said Wenlan with the trace of a smile, "and yet you start critiquing my humble self as soon as we meet. Now, if we were drinking, I'd fine you a very large cup of wine for that!" The riposte had her audience laughing. She then asked the men their names, and went on to ask Cassia and Paria theirs.

In the midst of their conversation, Sanzi came in and said to Wu Zhen, "Lunch and dinner have been ordered from the Sunset Cloud. Miss Fragrance has been invited and will be along shortly."

Wu Zhen nodded and turned to Lu Shu: "You'd never have been happy if I hadn't invited her, you know. When she gets here in a little while, you'll have to use a very careful strategy in that matter we spoke of. When you succeed, your brothers will expect you to throw a gigantic party."

"There's no need to make fun of me, Brother," said Lu Shu. "If I'm lucky enough to succeed, of course I'll treat you all." They went on chatting for some time, until outside the door they heard talk and laughter from many different voices, together with the tinkling of bells and the clatter of wooden-soled shoes.

If you are wondering who had arrived, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER SEVEN

*Guests play drinking games at a brothel banquet,
And visitors stir up trouble at a tea party.*

The guests were chatting in Cassia's room when they heard talk and laughter and the sound of footsteps outside the door. Then the curtain opened, and in walked a prostitute dressed in boys' clothing. It was Fragrance, and they invited her to join them. After greeting the guests and introducing herself to Cassia, Paria, and Wenlan, she took a seat beside Lu Shu. While the maid busied herself serving tea and replenishing the tobacco, the servant who had come with Fragrance brought in a water pipe with fittings of foreign-engraved silver and an ebony stem incised with decorative images. On top of it was a tobacco pouch of jade green satin with a colorful design in gold couching. It had silver drawstrings, a foreign-engraved silver opening with lotus flower designs interspersed with silver circles, and four colorful tassels. After filling the pipe with genuine Renhe fiber tobacco, he handed it to Fragrance. She took the pipe in her mouth, and the servant blew on the paper spill until it flared up, and then proceeded to light the dry tobacco. Fragrance drew on the pipe a couple of times before holding it to Lu Shu's mouth. He at once inhaled, and the sweet scent in his nostrils gave him a feeling of exhilaration. He and she gazed lovingly into each other's eyes, far more intimately than the day before.

Hearing word of the new arrivals, Phoenix and Lucky returned. Wenlan and Fragrance stood up and invited them over. Introductions followed, after which Cassia called out to Phoenix, "Come and have a smoke."

"No thanks, but you go ahead," she said. "I've had all I want." Cassia stood up and pulled Phoenix down to sit on the bed. "Come on, only a couple of puffs, just for fun." Phoenix lay down, but not before preparing a pipe for Wu Zhen.

"I've already been smoking for some time," he said. "Help yourself." She extended her invitation to the others, but they all said they didn't smoke. She smoked a little herself, leaving Wu Zhen on the edge of the bed, then moved to the other side and prepared a pipe for him, after which they took it in turns to smoke.

From where he sat, Mu Zhu saw them getting up and lying down, taking what looked like medicinal plaster from a little case, roasting it over the lamp, and then eating it, but he didn't know what it was they were eating and didn't like to ask. He sat where he was and stared blankly ahead of him. Then he noticed a low red lacquered table standing on top of a large square table, and on the former was something that looked rather like a wooden box or a toy pavilion. On the top and at each of the four corners were five shiny yellow objects that looked like tiny wax insects made of copper. On the front were two shiny brass posts and a sheet of glass inside which there was a piece of brass engraved with a design in gold. In the center of that was a round sheet of white porcelain, in the middle of which was a small hole as well as two glittering needles. At the edges of the porcelain were several black marks, some straight, some curved, which were neither characters nor magic symbols. From the inside of the object came a ticking sound like that of a willow switch on a donkey's back. Mu Zhu was puzzling over this, wondering what it might be, when suddenly he heard eleven booming sounds from inside the box.

At that moment Sanzi came in and removed the object to the dressing table and then, with the maid's help, carried the square table to the center of the room. He brought in four plates of cakes and pastries and set them on the table, made fresh tea, and arranged the chairs. Cassia and her fellow courtesans invited Fragrance and Wenlan and the six guests to help themselves. "We're still full," said Jia Ming. "We've only just had breakfast. We should let Fragrance and Wenlan eat first." Cassia and her colleagues pulled Fragrance and Wenlan over to the table and sat them down. Cassia offered them handfuls of melon seeds and candied dates, while Lucky offered cake and Paria snow pears.

Phoenix, who was on the bed smoking, raised herself on one elbow and apologized: "Sisters, please excuse me for not serving you. Do go ahead."

"See to your habit first," said Wenlan. "Don't interrupt your smoking."

"Phoenix is a lucky woman," said Fragrance. "She is able to take the elixir."

"You must be joking, Sister," said Phoenix. "This stuff will bury us alive." She lay down and resumed her smoking.

Fragrance peeled some melon seeds and, when no one was looking, slipped them into Lu Shu's hand. When the two women had finished eating, the plates were removed, and Wenlan took a seat beside the bed. Wu Zhen could tell from her complexion that she was a smoker, and he stood up. "Miss Wenlan, I'll let you smoke in my place." She did not demur but lay down opposite Phoenix. The guests continued to banter with the other courtesans. Mu Zhu was the only one who said nothing.

The clock struck two, and Sanzi reported to Wu Zhen, "The food has arrived, sir. Shall we serve it now or later?"

"Since it's here, let's have it now." Sanzi and the house handyman brought in a circular tabletop and placed it on the table, then arranged twelve chairs around it. They also set out twelve pairs of chopsticks as well as platters and heated up two self-service jugs of All Flowers wine and put them on the table. Wu Zhen then invited the guests to take their seats.

"With a circular table the question of seniority doesn't arise," said Jia Ming. "Brother Lu will sit next to Fragrance, that goes without saying. Brother Mu is a visitor from a long way off, and since Miss Wenlan has been invited to join us, she should keep him company. Brothers Yuan and Wei should sit beside whichever lady they like." He took Phoenix's arm. "Let's sit together."

"Perhaps Miss Lucky could sit beside me?" said Wei Bi.

"Miss Cassia already has a patron," said Yuan You. "That leaves Miss Paria as the odd one out. She'd better sit with me."

"It's not that we don't want to pay court to Miss Paria," said Jia Ming. "It's just that she's such a hot number we're afraid she might scorch us!"

"We've only just met, and already you're critiquing poor little me," she replied. "I'll have something to say to you later."

"We're an old married couple, you and I," said Cassia to Wu Zhen. "There's no need for any false modesty. Go ahead and sit down."

They took their seats, all except Mu Zhu, who remained standing. "Come and sit down, Master Mu," said Wenlan.

"Do sit down," added Yuan You. "As I told you in the courtyard a moment ago, I'll see that you don't come to any harm."

Wu Zhen pulled Mu Zhu over to the table and sat him down, where he found himself next to Wenlan. He blushed furiously and his heart began to pound—he was mortally afraid of touching her. But just as he was thinking of edging to the right, lo and behold, there on the other side was Paria. He was thoroughly unnerved.

When the maid noticed him shrinking into himself, she remarked, "Master Mu, I'm not speaking for Miss Wenlan, you understand, but if she's a little lacking in refinement, I do hope you'll make allowances for her. After you've had your lunch, I'll be your matchmaker."

"But I'm already engaged," he hastily replied. "Our horoscopes have been checked, and we're due to marry in the seventh month. The reason I'm here in Yangzhou is to buy some odds and ends for the wedding. I can't possibly get engaged to anyone else." The others couldn't contain their amusement at this exchange.

The courtesans deferred politely to each other as to who would offer a toast. Finally Cassia seized a wine jug and said, "In my own room I claim the right ahead of my sisters to drink to the whole company." Having filled all the cups, she raised hers in the air, drained it, then waited while the others drained theirs before bringing her cup down on the table and refilling all the cups. The other women handed around plates of fruit and nuts and toasted the company in their turn. Cassia said, "And now I claim another right ahead of my sisters: let's play guess-fingers!" They played three games, with each of them winning and losing. The losers asked the winners for an alternative penalty and ended up drinking or singing. Only Mu Zhu refused to play; he said he didn't even know how to play the game of guessing melon seeds. When his turn came to play guess-fingers, he preferred to drink a cup of wine instead, and nobody felt like forcing him to play.

By the time each of the women had started a game, some had had to drink wine as a penalty, others had had to sing songs. When a dish arrived, every-

one ate some of it. "Guess-fingers is terribly boring," said Wu Zhen. "Let's have some fun and play a literary game. What do you say, gentlemen?"

"That would be ideal," said Jia Ming, "but it should be a game to suit all tastes. Shall we include the courtesans, or just play among ourselves?"

"The six of us will each offer an entry. For example, when I finish mine, Miss Cassia will give us a song. When Brother Jia finishes his, we'll ask Miss Phoenix to oblige, and so forth. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Everyone approved of the idea except Mu Zhu, who said nothing. "What do you think, Brother Mu?" asked Wu Zhen.

"I don't know anything about this literary game business," he said. "I'd rather just go ahead and have a cup of wine."

"Since he won't be taking part, we should present him with a large cup," said the others, calling for one and filling it to the brim. Without a word of protest, he took it and drained it in a single draft, drawing a chorus of admiration from the others. "What a capacity the man has!"

Wu Zhen was then called upon to give the rules of the game. He drank the master's cup and announced, "One nickname from *Outlaws of the Marshes*,¹ one line from the *Four Books*,² and one line from the *West Chamber*,³ all of which have to make sense when strung together. Anyone who can't think of an answer, or who gives a wrong answer, will be penalized with a large cup."

"You lead the way."

"Jade unicorn / showed undue sorrow / and didn't care that gown and sleeves were damp from wiping away tear after tear."⁴

General praise greeted the answer. Cassia followed it with a "Soft and Even Air":

Pairs of swallows fluttering in the eaves,
 Peach trees aflame with blossom,
 Willows a misty green.
 Before the mirror
 Once rosy cheeks are pale and drawn.
 I long for his return,
 But no word comes.
 My breast is full of springtime sorrow,

My brows are locked in grief.
 Oh, dreary days!
 Where is he making merry?
 Oh, dreary days!
 Where is he making merry?

When she had finished, everyone applauded, but Wu Zhen said, "We're heartily sick of these conventional songs.⁵ If anyone else sings one, she'll have to drink a large cup."

"Quite right, quite right," they agreed.

Now it was Jia Ming's turn: "Master calligrapher / is awe-inspiring but not fierce; / with the tip of his brush he is able to sweep away five thousand."⁶ After everyone had praised it, Phoenix called for a lute, adjusted the strings, and sang a "Played and Lost":

Because of you I'm sick with love,
 Because of you I'm sick with love.
Aiya!
 Because of you I'm loath to dress my hair.
Such pain!
 Because of you my dreaming soul has soared beyond,
 Beyond Mount Wu.

Because of you my brows are dark with sorrow.
 Because of you my brows are dark with sorrow.
Aiya!
 Because of you I'm reduced to skin and bone.
Such grief!
 Because of you I don't know when I'll clear my debt,
 My debt of love.

She finished to general applause, and someone relieved her of the lute. "Miss Phoenix is a great flatterer," said Wu Zhen. "I don't know who she can be so lovesick for, considering that today she's pretending to be so fond of our brother Jia!"

"Master Wu, you'd better not make any more of these nasty insinuations," said Phoenix. "If I were to tell Cassia a certain something, you'd never hear the end of it."

"Enough of those fighting words," said Jia Ming. "Quick, Brother Yuan. Give us your offering."

Yuan said, "The tattooed priest / first cultivated his person / but had no respect for 'The Emperor's Penitence.'"⁷ It was greeted with applause, after which Paria sang a "Full River Red":

O, my handsome one,
 I love your romantic looks,
 Your natural elegance.
 I love your nature,
 Your cleverness in all you do,
 Your gentleness of speech.
 I love the fact you're never false,
 But absolutely true;
 We're a perfect karmic match.
 Worthless gems are easy to find;
 Genuine ones are few.
 So hard to find a man of feeling!
 When shall I have my wish?
 There's something dear to my heart
 That I want to ask but cannot.
 I wonder, would you say yes?
 That I want to ask but cannot.
 I wonder, would you say yes?

After the applause had died down, Wu Zhen commented, "There's no need to worry, Miss Paria. Our brother Yuan is more than willing to say yes, and I guarantee that tonight you'll get your wish."

"As to whether she gets her wish or not, we'll take that up later," said Jia Ming. "But right now we have to move along. It's Brother Lu's turn."

Lu Shu said, "The rake / bored a hole in the wall to peep; / if it isn't marriage he has in mind, what is it?"⁸

After the applause, Jia Ming had a question for Fragrance: "Did you hear those words straight from our brother Lu's heart?" She gave a faint smile and, calling to her servant to bring her a lute, adjusted the strings, and sang a "Split the Broken Jade":

O, my handsome one,
 You've forgotten when first we met.
 Then it was
 That I fell in love with you,
 And you with me.
 Our love was deep and true,
 And foolish me, I hoped that it would last forever.
 I never thought you'd cast me off along the way.
 You abandoned me, but I'll not let you go.
 O, you lecherous rake,
 You falsehearted rogue,
 Wicked deceiver of women—
 I only hope that soon you'll honor your vow.

Someone relieved her of her lute, and Wu Zhen commented: "Miss Fragrance, that song of yours was really very depressing. Our brother Lu is hardly as faithless as all that. I shall have to sentence you to drink a large cup."

"You may criticize my song, but I can really drink only a little. I shall have to beg for mercy."

"Only Brother Lu can give you that," said the others.

"If she sang a bad song, sentence her to sing a good one," suggested Lu Shu.

"Brother Lu can't bear to make her drink," said Jia Ming. "He's letting her off lightly."

"There's no need to carp, gentlemen," said Fragrance. "I'll pay for my sins by singing an Erhuang."

"See you choose one of the best," said Yuan You.

A musician was hastily summoned, and he took a seat beside Fragrance and began to play his fiddle. Fragrance picked up her lute, adjusted the strings, and sang:

Lin Daiyu, too bored for words, depressed at heart.
 Outside she hears the wind in the bamboos—utter desolation.
 She calls her maid to open the window and tries to lift her spirits.
 When first she came into this compound, such excitement!
 With Baoyu she shared her meals and even a bed.
 He loved me, and I loved him, never apart for an instant.
 Her foolish heart genuinely hoped she'd have him with her forever.
 But by this time they're both grown up, and boys and girls must part.
 They see each other, and nothing is said but trite, meaningless words.
 Then out of the blue along comes this relative, Auntie Xue.
 She has a daughter, Baochai by name, who seems so nice and proper,
 But she talks about the gold and jade as destined for each other,
 And foolish Baoyu, hearing this talk, gets wild ideas in his head.
 Have pity on me, all on my own, orphaned as a child.
 Without end, the pain in my breast! To whom can I bare my soul?
 All I can do is cry and cry, hiding my broken heart.
 Most hateful of all is Wang Xifeng, who has driven us lovers apart.

As she finished, the audience applauded. Someone relieved her of the lute, and the musician left the room. Then they all began pressing Wei Bi to give his offering. "I'm not going to," he said. "I'd rather drink a cup of wine." Wu Zhen would not accept that and continued to press him, until finally Wei Bi said, "The heavenly king who lifts the pagoda / arises every morning at the fifth watch / and tempts Master Zhang to leap over the wall."

"Brother Wei, what penalty should you pay for that?" asked the others in the midst of their laughter.

"I didn't make any mistakes, so why should I pay any penalty at all? 'Heavenly king' is Chao Gai's nickname, and you can't tell me that 'arises every morning at the fifth watch' isn't from one of the *Four Books*, or that the Master Zhang of 'and tempts Master Zhang to leap over the wall' isn't a character from the *West Chamber*?"

"Stop quibbling, Brother," said Jia Ming. "Chao Gai is not one of the heavenly or earthly stars in *Outlaws of the Marshes*, but he *is* a character in the novel, and we could let you get away with that. But 'arises every morning at the fifth watch' is from the *Girls' Classic of Filial Piety*,⁹ which was written by a later author; it's certainly not one of the *Four Books*, and

for that you'll be fined a large cup. 'And tempts Master Zhang to leap over the wall' isn't a line from the *West Chamber* but from some singer's 'Fresh Flowers,'¹⁰ and for that you'll be fined another large cup."

"I know I ought to accept your sentence," said Wei Bi, "but I really have a very small capacity where wine's concerned, and I couldn't drink both cups."

"Let me drink one of them for him," volunteered Lucky.

"You were due to sing a song, anyway," said Wu Zhen, "and now you want to drink instead of him, too. You'll have to give us a song first, before we can agree to that."

"If you wish."

"Let me drink a small cup," said Wei.

"If Brother Wei is adamant about not drinking, he should tell us a joke instead," said Jia Ming.

"Good idea," said the others.

"I don't sing well, so you'll have to make allowances," said Lucky. She set up a counter and rose from her seat. With a green imported-crepe handkerchief embroidered with a multicolored image of a phoenix among peonies that was done in gold couching, she performed a "Sweet Sixteen Artfully Applying Her Makeup."¹¹ Following the applause she went back to the table, removed the counter, and downed a large cup of wine.

Pressed to tell a joke, Wei Bi said, "Don't blame me if it doesn't make you laugh."

"It's all in fun. Who's going to criticize you? Get on with it."

"I'll only make a fool of myself."

"We can't wait to hear you."

"Two friends, both posing as men of culture, happened to meet on the road. After they had exchanged bows, one asked, 'Have you come up with any beautiful lines of poetry recently?' The other replied, 'Just the other day a friend of mine asked me to write a couplet for him. His parents were both in good health, he had a wife and several concubines, and he wanted the couplet to include references to the happiness of his entire family. I took the New Year's couplet 'As heaven adds another twelvemonth, people get a year older / As spring fills the world, good fortune fills the household' and changed a few characters, to read 'As Father adds another twelvemonth, Mother gets a year older / As the wife fills the world, the concubines fill

the household.' Do you think I managed to get the happiness of the whole family in?'

"The other man clapped his hands and roared with laughter. 'It goes to show that all men of culture think alike,' he said. 'The other day my mother had her sixtieth birthday, and everything was ready except the couplet. My brother wouldn't stoop to ask anybody to make one up, so he, too, adapted that same New Year's couplet, to read 'As heaven adds another twelvemonth, Mother gets a year older / As spring fills the world, Father fills the household.'"¹²

The audience roared with laughter, exclaiming "Father fills the household"—very good!" Wei Bi drank a small cup of wine. "Brother Mu isn't taking part," said the others, "so we'll offer him a large cup and then have a song from Miss Wenlan." Confident of his own capacity for wine, Mu Zhu raised the cup in both hands and drained it in a single draft.

"Now it's my turn to make a fool of myself," said Wenlan. "I don't sing well, so I hope you'll make allowances."

"There's no need for the clichés," said Yuan You. "Just hurry up and sing."

She sang a "Cutting Flowers":

Bored beyond words in her room,
 Listless when the craving hits,
 Truly she is buried alive.
 Innumerable yawns,
 Interminable sneezes,
 Tears that fall in a stream.
 No strength is left in her limbs;
 With an itch in her throat, a pain in her belly,
 She feels as if she were giving birth.
 She has no money for opium;
 The shops are shut, so she can't use credit.
 Smoking dross will be the death of her!
 "But should my lover truly care,
 He'll bring me a packet and save me,
 And I'll close my door and spend the rest of my life with him."

Following the applause, Yuan You said, "Miss Wenlan, if someday you do give it up, I'll bring you a big bowl of the stuff, so that you can shut your door and spend the rest of your life with me."

"Oh, you're all talk," she said, with a sidelong glance at him.

"Those answers you gave were great fun," said Paria. "I've thought of one, too. I don't know if it's acceptable or not."

"Let's hear it, by all means," said Jia Ming in a surprised tone of voice.

"Timely rain / a sudden clap of thunder / I am both startled and in love."¹³

Jia Ming praised it repeatedly. "It's succinct, and it makes perfect sense—extremely clever. We were so stupid we failed to see you had such a remarkable ability. We buried a true talent, as they say, and now we must offer you a large cup. We'll keep you company and drink one ourselves." He called for some large cups, picked up the jug, poured out one cup, and gave it to Paria. She stood up to receive it, then took the jug away from him and poured large cups for all of the others. They drained theirs as she drained hers, after which Wu Zhen drank another cup to start the final round. Jia Ming, Yuan You, Lu Shu, and Wei Bi each offered answers, and Phoenix, Cassia, Paria, Lucky, and Fragrance sang popular songs, while Wenlan sang "A Widow's Five Watches Lament,"¹⁴ which was well received.

"I've heard that you also have one called something like 'An Attendant's Five Watches Lament,'" said Yuan You to Wenlan. "It's said to be topical and also very good. We'd like you to sing it for us." At first, Wenlan said that she couldn't, but Yuan You insisted. He asked Phoenix and Fragrance to accompany her on the lute and summoned one of the musicians to sit on one side and play the fiddle. He also picked up a pair of ivory chopsticks and started drumming on a five-inch porcelain plate in an attempt to get Wenlan to start.

"I don't sing at all well," she said. "You will have to make allowances for me."

"We can't wait to hear you," they replied.

At first watch, the moon outside is brilliant;
Such a pity our fate is so wretched!
Enduring hardship,

We race here and there but never find a master.
 Leaving our homes, abandoning our parents;
 How I regret that long ago I never learned to reap and plow.
 North and south I go, urged on by friends,
 Money and clothes required.
Oh, heaven!
 Modesty must be set aside as I submit my letter of introduction.

At second watch the moon outside is bright.
 Such a pity our military skills fell short!
 In the lowest rank,
 At first we were fed on noodle water.
 I had no part in army orders, nothing to do with cavalry signals;
 I drew escort duty for soldier convicts sent to frontier camp.
 Escorting convicts, you hasten there and back;
 And if the convict gets irate, you smile and beg his pardon.
Oh, heaven!
 Even the fellows transporting freight I didn't dare offend.

At third watch the moon outside is chill.
 Such a pity, the troubles we face in serving officials!
 How infuriating,
 The toadying it takes to be an attendant!
 Serving tea and tobacco, we smile as we bend before them.
 Some officials like to fool around.
 Our friends tease us about it with sundry caustic remarks.
 Our hearts fill with rage, but we cannot tell a soul.
Oh, heaven!
 There's a saying: Catamite when young, brothel servant in your
 middle years, beggar in old age.

At fourth watch the moon outside is full.
 Such a pity we can't hold on to our money!
 If we have the good fortune
 To become a doorman and enjoy some power,
 Our clothes will be in the latest style, on a par with those of a clerk.

We'll learn to tell the different brands of opium,
 We'll spend our days and nights with whores and boy actors,
 We'll waste our money and forget our families.
Oh, heaven!
 At the first rebuff we'll pack up and leave.

At fifth watch the moon outside is on the wane.
 Such a pity, our less than human state!
 We cannot make complaints.
 Pulling strings to get a doorman's job,
 What with reports and messages, we have to keep our wits about us.
 Ordered here and there in utter confusion,
 Frantically busy all day long, terrified of shouts from every quarter,
 But let a doorman ask for money, and you'll see them throw a fit.
Oh, heaven!
 If I weren't so hooked on opium, I'd have gotten out years ago.

It's dawn, but the moon outside still lingers;
 Such a pity when we quit our jobs!
 No one knows the pain.
 We can't afford to stay in our lodgings.
 All our belongings are in the pawnshop, and our clothes are out of style.
 When the opium craving hits, there's nothing we can do.
 When we think of wife and children, we dissolve into tears.
 Our friends cannot pull any strings.
Oh, heaven!
 Who said that an official's attendant had to be sent so far from home to die?

The audience applauded with cries of "Marvelous!" Someone relieved Phoenix and Fragrance of their lutes, Yuan You put his chopsticks and the plate back on the table, and the musician went off with his fiddle. A large cup of wine was poured and offered to Wenlan, then everyone drank a similar cup in celebration of her singing. Phoenix and Fragrance each sang arias from opera as well as Xipi and Erhuang songs. By this time everyone was more than a little tipsy, and they said, "Let's have something to eat

now and continue the party in the evening." After eating, they wiped their hands and faces, then sat around the room drinking tea. Wu Zhen and Cassia went back to the bed and lay down to satisfy their opium habits.

At this point Mu Zhu insisted on leaving, and nothing Wu Zhen could say would dissuade him. "Since he wants to leave, why not let him go?" said Yuan You. On hearing those words, Mu Zhu fled from the room without even saying good-bye. As soon as he had left, Wu Zhen produced a note discounted forty percent and tipped the servants on Wenlan's behalf. He also gave her a two thousand cash note for herself, after which she took her leave. Yuan thanked Wu Zhen on behalf of Mu Zhu.

Phoenix led Jia Ming quietly off to her room. He noticed that the room, although sparsely furnished, was spotlessly clean. There were four portraits of beautiful women on the walls, plus a pair of calligraphic scrolls on yellow wax paper:

Phoenixes sing in harmony, *luan* birds dance together;
Forest flowers glow with brilliance, butterflies flit forever.

The first line of the attribution read, "Playfully composed by Miss Phoenix," and the second, "Written and presented by the Flower-Loving Student." After inviting Jia Ming to come in and sit down, Phoenix called in the maid to make a pot of strong tea. She chose a multicolored beaker of fine porcelain, half filled it with tea, and offered it to Jia Ming. She also told the maid to light the opium lamp and invited him to smoke. When he said he didn't smoke, she urged him to try one or two draws to relieve his hangover. Pulling him over to the bed, she prepared a pellet for him.

"I'm no smoker," he said, "but after a single draw, I believe this has more fragrance than what Miss Cassia keeps in her room. Why is that?"

"The other day a client brought me some of the big stuff,¹⁵ which I mixed and roasted. That's why it's a little more fragrant. Try another." After Jia Ming had smoked again, he found his hangover somewhat relieved.

"How many are there in your family?" he asked her, but she did not answer. He repeated the question several times, until finally she said with a sigh, "Master Jia, you mustn't laugh at me. I lost my mother when I was very young, and my father, who was both a drunkard and a gambler, promised me as a child bride to a son of Lan Siniang, a hairdresser in a brothel.

At the age of six I was taken to Qingjiang to learn to play music and sing, but I refused to learn and suffered goodness knows how many beatings and curses. My mother-in-law opened a house of her own in Qingjiang with a dozen or more girls, and at the age of twelve I was forced into the same filthy business. I can't tell you how much money I made for them! But my husband and his brother whored, gambled, and smoked opium. They also slept around among the girls, played any number of tricks, got involved in several lawsuits, and piled up over a thousand taels in debts. They couldn't keep the house going anymore and did a flit to Yangzhou. And now my mother-in-law, husband, and brother-in-law have rented a one-room shanty and need four or five hundred cash every day for their living expenses. I'm in here, and although I'm supposed to be on a split-fee basis, all my bedding was bought with a high-interest loan. The jewelry and clothes I had in Qingjiang have been pawned, and every day now I have to use high-interest loans to buy cakes, flowers for my hair, cosmetics, and other odds and ends, as well as a few pellets of that accursed stuff. Every day my family clamors for money. I've not been here very long and I have no steady clients. Tell me, how am I going to get by?" Tears welled up in her eyes.

"You may have fallen into prostitution," said Jia Ming, "but you don't have the vulgar manner of the typical prostitute. Just have patience; something good is bound to turn up. If you don't object, I would like to pay court to you. How would you feel about that?"

"But you're on top of the ladder, sir, and here am I with my large feet and ugly face. I'm afraid I'm not worth paying court to."

"I'm sick to death of that kind of talk! If you and I were to have a relationship, I could help you with all those little expenses you spoke of."

Maid Gao was filling the water pipe with tobacco when she heard this and spoke up. "Our Miss Phoenix is really extremely nice. The trouble is that she has only just arrived here and her family is such a heavy burden. If you do have a relationship with her, it will be her good fortune."

"We're working this out by ourselves," said Jia Ming. "We don't need any of those smart comments of yours. Soon you'll be saying I should thank you for serving as matchmaker, and then you'll be making requests of me."

"Ah, but whoever heard of a bride getting into the wedding chair on her own?"

As they bantered with each other, Lu Shu and Fragrance came in holding hands. "You were just getting to the best part of the discussion," said Lu Shu. "We shouldn't have come in and bothered you."

Phoenix scrambled to her feet. "Master Lu, Sister Fragrance, please sit down." Maid Gao filled their pipes with tobacco and offered them tea.

"I was just discussing her family affairs with Miss Phoenix," said Jia Ming. "It's a very sad story." Phoenix invited Lu Shu and Fragrance to smoke some opium, but they declined and told her to lie down herself and satisfy her habit.

After some more idle conversation, Sanzi came in and announced, "Master Wu is inviting all of you to afternoon tea." Phoenix told Maid Gao to put out the lamp and ushered the guests into Cassia's room, where they had some refreshments and chatted and joked with one another. In the evening, the candles were lit, the table was set, and they seated themselves in the same places as before.

In the midst of the revelry, when they were half tipsy, they heard the footsteps of a number of men in the courtyard below, as well as the sound of several torches being thrown to the ground. Then they heard Sanzi's voice calling out, "Please come in and take a seat," followed by the sound of men entering the room opposite. Sanzi came into their room and quietly called Paria and Lucky out. Before long Lucky came back, canceled her counter, and took her seat again, winking at Phoenix to indicate that she should leave the room. Somewhat later, they heard raised voices in the room opposite, as well as teacups being dashed to the floor. "You show us no respect!" someone was shouting. "It's not that we come here very often. What do you take us for? This is an insult!" Then they heard Paria replying, "Godfathers,¹⁶ what has made you so angry? Whatever we've done wrong, please make allowances for my sake." Then they heard the men saying, "These people will heed the guardian gods with their eyes open, but not Buddha with his eyes shut."¹⁷ We're leaving. We'll see how long this house of yours can go on playing these games." There followed a babble of voices as they returned to the courtyard and relit their torches. They could still be heard muttering as they took a furious departure.

If you wish to know what happened, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Theft and abduction strike the brothel after a display of force;

Dinner and apologies are offered by way of mediation.

Hearing the uproar in the room opposite, Fragrance began to tremble with fear. As soon as Wu Zhen heard the men lighting their torches and leaving, he called Sanzi into the room. "Who were those people just now? And what were they quarreling about?"

"I know only two of them," said Sanzi. "One is You Deshou, commonly known as You Butou, who used to be in the local militia. The other is Yan Xiang, who was a pastry cook in a teahouse. Together with a few disreputable young low-class types, they came here for an introductory tea party, but once inside the door they were spoiling for a fight. We quickly ushered them into one of the rooms and asked them to sit down, but no sooner had the tea been poured than they began complaining about the tobacco being late in arriving and put on a deliberate show of anger. Then they flung their cups down on the floor and went off ranting and raving."

"Where is your owner, Qiang Da? Why wasn't he here to meet them?"

"He's off at the bathhouse."

"They may not let this matter rest, you know."

"What! That useless lot? They're of no account at all. Let them do whatever they want."

"Is Miss Fragrance's chair here yet?"

"Yes."

"There's no need to be afraid," Wu Zhen said to Fragrance. "We're just sending you home a little earlier than expected."

Lu Shu produced a silver dollar as a tip for the house staff and also gave notes to Fragrance's servant and the musician. "I'll bring your fee tomorrow," he said to Fragrance.

She nodded. "Please take me back."

"It's too late now, but I'll be there tomorrow," he said. Fragrance whispered something in his ear and urged him to come early, which he promised to do. She said good-bye to the other guests and also to the courtesans, then went out the main entrance and stepped into her sedan chair outside the gate. Before she left, Sanzi brought out four packages of pastries and lit two benzoin candles¹ and gave them to her servant.

Meanwhile the guests, who were now anxious to return home, called a halt to their drinking. Cassia was reluctant to let Wu Zhen go, but he said he had important business to attend to and could not afford to stay the night. He repeated that excuse several times, until she lost patience with him. She grew red in the face and made a number of caustic remarks before she finally let him leave with the others. After arranging to meet the next morning at the Futura teahouse, they went their separate ways.

Let me turn now to You Deshou and his men after they left Qiang Da's place. They were seething with anger as they compared ideas on what to do next. "A turtle retreats under its shell," said You Deshou, "but we'll do no such thing. We'll get some fellows together, go back to that place, and stir things up by grabbing a couple of their girls. Our friends on gate duty at the yamen will naturally see that a mediator steps forward to settle the matter and clip their wings a bit. That'll teach them what's good for them. Then they'll show us some respect!"

"One of the runners on duty at the Jiangdu yamen used to belong to the same club as I did," said Yan Xiang. "I'll take responsibility for whatever you do and see you don't get into any trouble."

"Great!" said the others, before going off to Xingjiao Temple Street, where they recruited a dozen would-be toughs, troublemakers all of them. At the general store they asked to buy torches but produced from their purses only twenty or thirty cash, mostly in the smallest denominations, then simply grabbed a dozen torches. After lighting the torches, they also seized a dozen pestles from the rice store before swarming over to Qiang Da's house.

The main door was open, and they rushed headlong inside. There was a sudden clamor of voices in the house and the glare from numerous torches. Not knowing what was happening, some of the playboys and their courtesans were so terrified that they wet themselves. The shrewder ones quickly hid in the cellar, or behind one of the beds, or in the woodpile. Lucky was the only courtesan who failed to escape in time, and two low-level toughs, Tang Tong and Meathead Shi, seized her by the hair and stripped off all her hairpins. Meanwhile You Deshou calmly and deliberately led his men in smashing up the window latticework and other items. But although they searched high and low for Qiang Da, they could not find him.

There was a man in Paria's room who was enjoying an introductory tea party. His name was Bai Shixin, and as an eldest son he was known as Bai Da. He made a practice of frequenting introductory tea parties in the various brothels around town, and also of freeloading, conveying orders and invitations for people and then sponging off them at festival time. Whenever there was an altercation in a brothel, he would insist on acting as mediator, and each side would then start bidding against the other for his favor. While at his tea party he had heard the hubbub outside and now rushed from the room. At sight of You Deshou and Yan Xiang and their men, he stopped them and asked, "Brother You, what's this all about?"

"No need to concern yourself, Brother Bai," said You Deshou. "They treated us with disrespect and embarrassed us terribly. We're just smashing up a few things to drive the blasted place out of business."

Bai Shixin dropped to his knees in front of them, blocking their way and pleading with them: "Brothers, restrain yourselves for a moment. Qiang Da may not know how to treat people properly, but you also have to consider the feelings of Master Yu, who looks after the interests of this place. He's a great fellow and a good friend to have. Hand Miss Lucky over to me for the present. Master Yu is off just now, so this is not a good time to talk to him, but let me invite you to the Cold Garden on the Parade early tomorrow morning. Master Yu and I will both be there, and we'll be able to work things out with you."

You Deshou refused to yield, but just as his men were about to drag Lucky out of the gate, Yu Jiafu, who looked after Qiang Da's house, came puffing up with two runners. When he entered and saw the crowd of men there, he knelt down in front of them, blocking their way and pleading for

leniency. Bai Shixin and the two runners added their voices to his. Finally, after much persuasion, You Deshou's followers released Lucky and handed her over to Bai, after which, with their torches and pestles in hand, they made a triumphant exit.

Yu Jiafu invited Bai Shixin into Lucky's room. Now that the servants, who had been in hiding, saw that the intruders had left, they quickly came in and offered tea and tobacco.

"Thank you for all the trouble you took, Brother," said Yu Jiafu to Bai Shixin. "But for you, goodness knows what damage they might have done."

"I came here for my own amusement, and also to have a talk with Qiang Da," said Bai Shixin. "Then I saw the trouble they were causing, and with you not here, I felt I couldn't just stand by like an idiot and do nothing. By the way, how did you come to hear of it?"

Sanzi, who was standing to one side, volunteered: "When they came in, I could see that they were up to no good, so I slipped out to fetch Master Yu from his house, but I happened to meet him on the way and asked him to come." Yu Jiafu was a yamen runner whose proper name was Yu Ren, and as a fourth brother, he was known as Fourth Master. For looking after the interests of Qing Da's house he was paid a monthly retainer and received presents at festival time. On other occasions he might also make requests for things. It was a profitable arrangement, and so when Sanzi asked him, he had come at once.

Sanzi lit the opium lamp and brought it to Yu Jiafu so that he could smoke. Then Lucky rushed in, sobbing bitterly, and thanked Bai Shixin and Yu Jiafu. "Did you come to any harm, Miss Lucky?" asked Yu Jiafu. "Are any of your belongings missing?"

"Thanks to Godfather Bai, who stopped them, I didn't come to any harm myself, but they took all my hairpins and bracelets, as well as a silver dollar and a two thousand cash note from my purse."

"Well, don't cry. I guarantee you'll get it all back tomorrow."

"I must thank you both for helping your poor goddaughter. Let me kowtow a few more times."

Yu Jiafu told Sanzi to call Qiang Da, who came in, knelt down, and kowtowed. "Thank you, gentlemen," he said. Then he stood up and said to Yu Jiafu: "Fourth Master, this blasted place is impossible to run! They were no sooner in the room than we called for courtesans to keep them company

and offer them tea and tobacco. Then for no earthly reason they got mad, smashed their teacups, and went off ranting and raving. I wasn't in at the time and didn't find out about it until I came back from my bath. But a little later they rounded up a lot of people and came storming back here. I was smart enough to see what was happening and managed to escape. They smashed the latticework and various other things and went off with a good many of our belongings. If Master Bai hadn't been here to stop them, Miss Lucky herself would have been dragged off. These last few days we haven't done any business at all. Last night we cleansed the whole place with vinegar.² Today we managed to book a banquet, but just when our guests were beginning to loosen up, these people came in and caused an uproar, and everyone dispersed. I don't know yet whether we'll even get paid for it. The more I think about this, the madder I get. There's something I'd like your opinion on. Several aides from the yamen come here all the time. I was thinking of getting them to join me in a lawsuit."

"If you want to bring a lawsuit, I can't stop you, but before you do, you'd better hand Miss Lucky over to Master Bai and let him pass her on to them. Otherwise, how is he going to be able to face them? And if you're planning to rely on the support of those aides, how could they continue to come here all the time? Not in a million years will they ever show their faces again. If you don't plan to do business in Yangzhou anymore, go right ahead, file your lawsuit and then fold up. But think for a moment first: how much money do you owe your creditors? You surely don't imagine that after you file your lawsuit they won't want their money, do you? You'd do far better to swallow your anger. I suggest that Master Bai and I meet those people on the Parade tomorrow and talk to them about returning the things that they took. As the owner, you ought also to get them to look out for your interests in the future."

"You're quite right, sir," put in Sanzi. "Just now his anger is clouding his judgment. Take no notice of him. We should follow your advice." Yu Jiafu smoked for some time and did not leave until after midnight. The meeting was arranged for early next morning at the Cold Garden. Whoever arrived first would wait there for the others.

Next morning, when Yu Jiafu and the two runners arrived at the Cold Garden teahouse, Bai Shixin was already there. He called them over to join him, and they drank tea and had some breakfast. A little later, You

Deshou, Yan Xiang, and the members of the band they had assembled the night before came streaming in one after the other. Yu Jiafu and Bai Shixin rose to their feet and beckoned them over, and together they filled several tables. Ordering noodles, pastries, tripe dumplings, and wheat cakes in onion sauce, they fell upon the food like starving tigers, with constant shouting and bickering. Yu Jiafu waited until everyone had finished his breakfast before getting up and going over to the other tables and pouring tea for them. "Brothers!" he began, "I made a point of coming here today to ask for your kind consideration. Qiang Da doesn't know how to treat people properly, but I hope that as a favor to me you will overlook that. Let him make up for all his faults by paying for a banquet. You should also be good enough to return the things that you took from his house."

"I was too young, sir, and I'd spent too little time about town to know that you were looking after the interests of that house," said You Deshou. "But Qiang Da really did look down on us, and so we fully intended to grab a couple of his girls yesterday and force him out of business. But we were stopped by that redeeming spirit,³ Master Bai, and then by you, when you came rushing up. None of us young fellows could possibly ignore your wishes, my dear sir. We're only too grateful to you for putting in an appearance at the teahouse today. We've long admired you as a great fellow, even though we have never tried to cultivate your acquaintance. By rights we ought to do just as you say, but we have not overdone it so far, and this suggestion of yours is something we simply cannot live with. We certainly don't want the stigma of taking Qiang's property, so we'll return everything that belongs to the house. But get him to put on two plays and provide a banquet with ten tables for us, and we'll forgive him. Otherwise, tell him to get a warrant for our arrest. We'll accept it."

"What are you saying, Brother You?" said Yu Jiafu. "Qiang Da may not know how to treat people properly, but I'm not exactly stupid. With a little education, I might even qualify as a friend. In the past we could have honored your request for plays, but you must bear in mind that Qiang Da's business really is in a bad way. I'm not just pleading poverty. Ask Master Bai—he'll tell you the same thing."

You Deshou was adamant. He was on the point of leaving when Bai Shixin caught his arm and gave it a pinch or two. "Don't try to drive too hard a bargain with Master Yu," he said. "As the saying goes, 'Even the

cleverest daughter-in-law can't make rice gruel without rice.' With regard to the way Qiang Da's treated you, I'd be inclined to resent it, too. But in this case, don't look at the one who's playing with the dragon lantern, look at the one who sends in his card. Put the responsibility on Master Yu. Since Qiang Da's business really is in bad shape, and he can't afford to put on any plays, let him pay for his sins by laying on a four-table banquet at the Beijing restaurant. Come on, take the offer, brothers. Let the man live."

At a nearby table sat a number of fellows who regularly got free meals at the brothels. They now came over and urged an amicable solution, offering themselves as mediators. Once the matter was settled, they would all go off together to dinner and things would return to normal. Two of the men who had gone to the brothel the previous night with You Deshou now tried their best to persuade him to accept the proposal. "There's no need to say another word," they insisted. "Put all the responsibility on Fourth Master."

A deeply pained You Deshou called the pair of young toughs over and gave them instructions: "See you return all the clothes and jewelry you took last night to Qiang Da's house. We'll be waiting for you at the Beijing restaurant."

One of the pair was a man named Qian Guanzhi. His late father had been a loan shark who built up a considerable fortune, taking particular delight in acts of petty chicanery. Whenever he bought a piece of property, he would delay the closing until a few hours before the New Year,⁴ when the silver he paid over would be low grade and mixed with lead. Pity the poor seller, with goodness knows how many debts waiting to be settled from the proceeds of the sale! If he objected to the quality of the silver, the loan shark would simply refuse to go through with the closing, and so the seller would have no choice but to swallow his anger and write off the loss. At the time of his death, the property the father left was worth ten thousand taels. Qian Guanzhi was even more crafty and devious than his father, but somehow or other he proved just *too* crafty and devious, for before the year was out he had craftily managed to lose the entire fortune that his father had worked so hard to amass. Fortunately, his wife was quite good-looking, and she formed secret liaisons with several men. Qian Guanzhi himself joined You Deshou's group, running about with them and doing the heavy work for them. Because his father had left him a fortune and he

had failed to keep it, people called him String of Cash instead of using his proper name.⁵

The other man was Yu Zhao, whose mother and wife both worked as matchmakers. Yu himself had put in a few days as a runner at the yamen, but he thought of himself as a tough character and took a vicious tone with people, which caused them to call him the Viper. Both men hurried off to carry out You Deshou's instructions.

Yu Jiafu saw that Sanzi from Qiang Da's house was sitting nearby drinking tea, and he whispered to him: "Go back to the house and see if there's anything still missing after they've returned the goods. Then hurry back and report to me at the Beijing restaurant."

After reckoning up the cost of the breakfast at each table, Yu Jiafu told the waiter to go to Qiang Da's house to collect the money. He then invited You Deshou and his followers as well as Bai Shixin and the would-be swindlers to move to the Beijing restaurant outside Little East Gate, where they filled four tables. Yu Jiafu told the waiter to serve wine and prepare the dishes. At this point Qian Guanzhi and Yu Zhao came racing in, panting and sweating, and reported to You Deshou, then took their seats at the other end of his table. Next Sanzi came in and quietly drew Yu Jiafu outside. "They've brought the things back. There are only some odds and ends still missing, worth no more than one or two thousand cash altogether. However, they've returned neither Miss Lucky's jewelry nor the money and note that they took from her purse."

"If we bring it up with them now, no one's going to produce the goods. We'll just have to take the loss and put it down to bad luck."

"The boss wants you to go over to the house. He has something important he wants to talk to you about."

"I'll go over as soon as I leave here."

Returning to the restaurant, Yu Jiafu picked up the wine jug and was about to go around the tables toasting the guests, when You Deshou and his men leapt to their feet and protested, "No, no! Let us!" Bai Shixin snatched the jug away from him and said, "Do sit down. Let me pour the wine for you."

Yu Jiafu gave a sweeping bow to his guests. "Brothers," he began, "in all matters from now on please keep an eye out for Qiang Da's interests, for my sake." Now that they had been mollified, You Deshou and his men

had no further use for the proprieties. They took Yu Jiafu by the hand and pulled him down to join them. Then they played guess-fingers and indulged themselves until they were gorged and drunk before they finally left the restaurant.

After seeing them out the door, Yu Jiafu expressed his gratitude to Bai Shixin. "Yesterday I was in a fix," said Bai, "and I went to visit Qiang Da to see if he could help me out. I just happened to be there when they caused all that trouble. I hope I can count on you for help, Brother."

"Give me a day or two."

"I'd be ever so grateful," said Bai as he took his leave.

Yu Jiafu reckoned up the cost of the meal, tips, and tobacco, and told the restaurant to collect the money from Qiang Da, then left the restaurant with the two runners and headed for his own place.

If you are wondering what Qiang Da wanted to tell Yu Jiafu, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER NINE

*Hooligans send in their cards and collect gratuities,
And petitioners protest injustice and start lawsuits.*

Yu Jiafu and the two runners went up to Paria's room in Qiang Da's house, where Qiang joined them and thanked them for their help. He ordered tea and tobacco and arranged for an opium lamp to be lit so that Yu Jiafu could satisfy his habit.

The moment Lucky heard of their arrival, she rushed in and greeted them. "I quarreled with them over those things of yours—jewelry, a silver dollar, and a note," Yu Jiafu told her, "but no one would own up to having them. I'm afraid you're just fated to lose out on this. One day I'll catch a wild pig¹ and make it up to you."

"Thank you, godfather, for all the trouble you've taken," she said. Noticing that the lamp was lit, she said, "Let me get the pellet ready for you." She lay on the bed and prepared the opium with the pick. Yu Jiafu lay down and began to smoke.

Qiang Da took a seat beside him. "Tell me, Master Yu, how on earth am I going to keep this place going?" he asked. "Business is getting steadily worse, and in the last few days I've had to deal with invitations to those hooligans, as well as with name cards, weddings, and funerals, and I simply can't cope. Not only do I not know some of the people who send in cards, I've never even heard of them. What's even more absurd, that old fellow from Luzhou who used to sell tobacco outside the yamen gate, the one known as Paper Tiger, sent in a card under the name of Liu Shi, and

yesterday he came along to collect his gratuity. I gave him the standard eighty cash, and he just stood there and kicked up the most terrible fuss in a mixture of accents. Luckily he ran into a client who knew him and who forked out a few dozen cash, and after that he finally took himself off. Whether these people are men or ghosts, they're equally vicious. Frankly, I don't know what it is they expect. Yesterday the local warden, Fang Sheng, brought me in a petition that he said had come from old man Bi—I haven't told you about it. And now today Fang has brought me in another one that he says is from the military licentiate Bao Qiong. None of these things is very important, but all of them cost money. Before I know where I am, we'll be in the middle of the Dragon Boat Festival. Tell me, how am I going to cope?"

"Let me see the petitions," said Yu Jiafu. Qiang Da went inside and came back with two petitions on white document paper. Yu Jiafu told Qiang Da to hand them to Wang Seven. "I can't read," he said to Wang. "You read it out to me." Wang read one, as follows:

Petition prepared by Bao Qiong, military licentiate, and presented by his agent, Li Sheng.

I beg to inform you of the seduction of my nephew by a prostitute and also of an act of violence perpetrated by people relying on superior numbers.

Following the death of my brother, I brought my nephew Bao Jing back to my house and raised him. Failing to complete his studies, he gave himself up to idleness and dissipation. Despite frequent remonstrances from me, he did not reform his ways but sometimes stayed out all night. On more than one occasion he took clothes and jewelry from my house. I intended to have him declared incorrigible but was deterred by his widowed mother's protectiveness toward him.

On the eighth of this month my degenerate nephew was so brazen as to sneak my wife's gold earrings, silver bracelets, gold rings, and so forth out of the house. For several days thereafter he did not show his face at home. I searched high and low for him and found that Qiang Da, who keeps a brothel on Ninth Lane, had enticed him in and concealed him in the house. I went there to find my nephew and personally observed him sitting at a table and drinking wine with Paria, Lucky,

and other prostitutes. I was about to roar at him when, to my surprise, Qiang Da drew himself up and came forward and blocked my way. After hiding my nephew, he had the effrontery to threaten me with violence. Following a brief argument, he ordered a number of servants, both male and female, to charge at me and beat me up. Since I was on my own, it was not possible for me to contend with them, and I hastily made my escape.

I appealed to the local warden for protection, but he paid no attention. Acts such as harboring prostitutes to lure young men of good family and leading a group of people to commit violence are against the law. If this affair is not investigated and prosecuted, my nephew will surely meet his death at their hands. To complete the information, I have asked the local warden to file a report.

I humbly request Your Honor to speedily grant that constables be dispatched to arrest Qiang Da and investigate the case thoroughly, that my nephew and the articles he took from us be turned over to me, and that punishment be administered according to the law. This petition that I have prepared is the truth.

When Wang had finished reading it, Yu Jiafu asked Qiang Da: "What made Bao Qiong decide to play the petition game?"

"I happened to run into him at the Willow Lane opium parlor the other day, and he asked me for money to buy a couple of packets, but I didn't give him any. I expect that's why he's making trouble."

"Look, if you make your living running a brothel, you need to keep your wits about you. Even if you'd bought him the two packets, at most it would have cost you only a few dozen cash. You must realize that you'll never be able to settle for as little as that now." He turned to Wang: "Now read me the other one."

Petition prepared by Bi Qingjia, Candidate for Subprefect, and presented by his agent, Wang Shun.

I beg to inform you of a display of violence on the part of a brothel keeper and of the urgent need for an investigation. My family is originally from Huizhou, but I live on Eighth Lane in the Old City

of Yangzhou. While returning home last night, I was passing along Ninth Lane when in the distance I saw flames leaping into the sky and heard a flurry of shouts and cries. I assumed that some house had caught fire and went ahead to investigate, only to find that it was the prostitutes Cassia, Lucky, and others from the house of the veteran brothel keeper Qiang Da returning from an assignment. Their bearers were fighting with their torches in front of the gate, blocking the lane. I ordered them to give way, but instead they turned violent. Qiang Da was present, but rather than shout at them to stop, he had the gall to order the bearers, the brothel steward, and his servants to rush at me and beat me. Their torches badly singed my clothes, which are available for Your Honor's inspection. Fortunately there were some people passing by, and I managed to make my escape. I informed the local warden, but he took no action. I submit that harboring prostitutes is against the law, and that leading others to commit acts of violence is even more illegal. If these matters are not investigated, the neighborhood will not be safe. To complete this information, I have asked the warden to file his report.

I humbly request that Your Honor look into this matter and order arrests and investigations to uphold law and morality. In this petition that I have prepared everything is the truth.

"Why is the old fellow doing this, too?" asked Yu Jiafu.

"He always comes along at festival time for his gratuity. Last year, during the New Year festival, he came for it on the very day the kitchen god was being sent off.² Then in the second month he sent in his card, and I responded. The other day he happened to see me on the Parade and asked me to help him out by lending him a few hundred cash. I told him I'd done no business in days and turned him down. I suppose that must be the reason."

"That was another mistake on your part. You just weren't very smart. If you had given him the two hundred when he brought up the matter, that would have been the end of it. Now you're going to have to pay out a bit more. People like that will first cook up a petition, assuming it's the key to success. If you don't buy into it, they'll spend a few cash on a

charge and submit it to the magistrate of one of the counties, or to the prefectural registry, or to the police department, and for those people the accusation is as good as a banknote. The officials will send out a runner, and you may be sure it will cost you money—nine or ten silver dollars at the very least. And you'll have to buy off the plaintiff, too, before you can settle the case. What you're doing is called 'losing a lot to gain a little.' If you're going to run one of these damned places, you've got to be savvy and loosen your purse strings. As the saying goes, 'Brothel inflow, brothel outflow.' Without these expenses, the owners of these damned rice bowls would all be as rich as salt merchants. Give me the petitions, and tomorrow I'll meet both men on the Parade and lay out a few cash on a confounded meal."

"How much will it cost?"

"At least two forty-percent discounted notes for each of them before they'll show you any mercy. Oh, and there's one other case that I haven't told you about. There's someone named Guo Xueyou who's sent around a note demanding four silver dollars from each house."

"Who is he?"

"He's either a stipendiary or a licentiate, I'm not sure which. A couple of years ago he was a pigeon,³ a big player in the first-class houses. He had a heap of money, which he's completely run through, and now he's learned to play the villain himself. He writes up legal charges for other people and provokes lawsuits in order to collect the fees. This spring he held a banquet at the Yuanxingtang in Ganquan that cost him a lot of his own money. In his case we have no choice but to respond. He's already spoken to me twice about it, and if we don't give him the money, I'm afraid he'll come here himself. He has such a huge opium habit that, once he lights up, goodness knows how many of those little packets of yours he'll go through. And if you fall just a tiny bit short in your attentions, he'll launch a vicious attack on you. In my opinion, you'll just have to do these things. You ought to send him two notes at a twenty percent discount. I'll still have to go and plead poverty for you, and even so, I can't be sure that he'll agree."

"These last few days I really haven't had any money. I've missed a dozen payments on the high-interest loan I took up with that out-of-town lender. The day before yesterday I spoke to him about working out some arrange-

ment, and he allowed me to pay him the day after tomorrow. So please hold these ones off for two more days. I'll see to them as soon as I've repaid the loan."

"You don't expect old Bi and Bao Qiong to wait, do you? Why, if they were cooking shrimp, they couldn't wait for it to turn red! Let me put up the money for you, and for Guo Xueyou's note as well."

"Even better. Thank you."

"With regard to those cards you received from swindlers, you need to fit the gratuity to the person. Big ones get a lot, small ones get little. Even if you don't recognize the names on the cards, you can't say so. You just have to work out a standard amount for them, lest one small thing mushroom into all kinds of problems—another case of losing a lot to save a little. If you're not doing any business, go and buy a cockerel today and sacrifice it tonight, hold a celebration, and then tomorrow morning pluck up your spirits and struggle along one day at a time. Providing you put your trust in heaven, your business will turn the corner. Cleaning up your personal debts—that can be left until later. Just now you're carrying so much debt that you're like someone riding a tiger—you can't get off. Think about it. Am I right or not?"

"You're right, of course, but with business the way it is, how am I going to get by?"

"What owner of a house doesn't have debts? If they all fretted about them the way you do, they'd worry themselves to death!"

"How much did breakfast and lunch come to?"

"Over seven thousand cash."

"It's just as they say, 'You shut your door and sit quietly at home, and disaster strikes from the sky.' It's like bumping into an old man on the street and causing his death."

"Oh, there's something I almost forgot to tell you. Another funny thing has happened. Bai Shixin told me that he wants you to help him out, which is an indirect way of asking for a reward. I chuckled to myself, but I couldn't very well turn him down. I agreed to meet him in a day or two. You'll need to give him a small tip."

As they spoke, Fang Sheng, the local warden, came looking for Qiang Da. On hearing Yu Jiafu's voice, he walked in and greeted the two men.

"Well, Warden Fang, what brings you here?" asked Yu Jiafu. "What do you have to tell us?"

"There are two things. First, I've come about what happened last night. I'm still concerned about it, and I'm here to ask some questions. Second, this morning old Bi came to ask me about it, and just as I was having tea with him, Bao Qiong brought in a petition. I told them both to wait until last night's trouble had been settled, when someone would of course come and talk to them. They left after drinking tea that cost me several dozen cash. I brought the petition over here before noon, but I didn't find Qiang Da in, so I've come back again."

"What happened last night has already been settled, but thank you for your concern," said Yu Jiafu. "I'll be meeting old Bi and Bao Qiong on the Parade. You certainly won't be put to any trouble. Qiang Da, bring me a hundred cash." Qiang Da fetched the money and put it on the table, and Yu Jiafu handed it to Fang Sheng. "Take this in return for this morning's tea, and then in a few days' time you should get Qiang Da to treat you," he said.

"My friendship with Qiang Da goes back a long way. I'm indebted to him for help in many things. If I asked him for money for everything I do for him, I'd hardly be a friend."

"Very well, then. If I have to put it this way, let's say I am the one who's providing the tip."

Fang Sheng picked up the money and took his leave.

Lucky was preparing the opium for Yu Jiafu when Sanzi walked in and said, "Miss Lucky, Master Wei is here."

"You mean the one who came to the party yesterday?"

"That's right."

"Off you go," said Yu Jiafu. "Put in a request and make up for the money and jewelry they took away from you last night."

"I'll leave you for a moment, godfathers," she said with a smile. "Please excuse me."

Qiang Da was about to call for another courtesan to prepare the opium, but Yu declined: "Don't bother. I'll do it on my own." He smoked a while, satisfying his habit, then took up the petitions and left with the runners. He found Bi Qingjia at the Bamboo Heater teahouse on the Parade and

joined him at his table. "I don't mean to be critical, old friend," he said, "but you're already receiving gratuities from Qiang Da's house at festival time, and now you want him to help you out on top of that. Even if he failed to do you some favor or other, you should have come to me about it. How could you be so thoughtless?"

"I do get a few cash from him at festivals, but that's your generosity, not his. I was in a tight spot a few days ago, so I called on him for help, and he turned up his nose at me. That's why I played this trick on him."

"There's no need to say any more. Here's a note. Look, do me a favor, will you? From now on let's have an understanding about this sort of thing."

Bi Qingjia looked at the note in his hand, which was for four hundred and eighty cash, and clicked his tongue in disappointment. "Fourth Brother, this is too little!"

"Don't tell me it's too little. I'm the one who's putting up the money." He handed back the petition. "This must have cost you all of one penny!" Bi Qingjia took charge of it, after which he and Yu Jiafu bowed to each other and parted.

Yu Jiafu also found Bao Qiong. "Brother Bao," he began, "when you were trying to get money recently, you weren't at all fair! You take money at the festivals, and on top of that you go and cause trouble with your petition. You're depriving the owner of any chance of making a go of it!"

"Don't blame me, Fourth Brother. Qiang Da has forgotten his beginnings as a house handyman. Now that he's an owner and has made some money, he looks down on all the rest of us. The way he took that pipe in the Willow Lane opium parlor the other day was the last straw! I really did want to clip his wings. And I don't *want* any more favors from him at festival time."

"I don't mean to offend you, Brother, but you shouldn't talk like that. If you get no more favors from this or that house, where will you go for gratuities?" He took out a note for three hundred and twenty cash and handed it to Bao Qiong together with the petition. "Here, go and smoke some opium. From now on let's have no more of this uncalled-for behavior."

Bao Qiong took the note and the petition and, glancing at the amount on the note, said, "Please forgive me," gave a deep bow, and left. Yu Jiafu then went in search of Guo Xueyou, to deal with his demand.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TEN

*Inside her red silk curtain a beauty is startled by a strange dream;
In the Temple of the White-Robed, Guanyin issues a fortune slip.*

Jia Ming and his brothers had been enjoying a banquet at Qiang Da's house on Ninth Lane when they were disturbed by You Deshou and his followers. Before parting for the night, they had arranged to meet the following morning at the Futura teahouse on the Parade. Arriving at the teahouse one after the other, they ate their breakfast and then went to the Hill Garden bathhouse at the top of Ridge Street to take a bath and have their heads shaved. Then they went on to the Chaoyanglou restaurant for lunch, and afterward arranged to attend introductory tea parties at several first-class brothels, the Shuangshoutang on Ridge Street, the Tianqingtang at the Stone Arch, Xiong Baoyu's at Hongshuiwang, and the Shuangqingtang in Shui'aoli. Their day was filled with music, song, and beautiful women.

In the afternoon, as they walked along Left Garrison Street,¹ they saw a large plum-red printed notice on the doorway of the money shop owners' guildhall. "Red Plum Hall," the notice said in thick black ink. Beneath it was a small square sheet of plum-red paper bearing the words "Please Enter." Lu Shu wondered what it meant and asked Jia Ming, "What is this place? And why did they stick that piece of paper up there?"

"Let me explain. This is the money shop owners' guildhall. A few cultured fellows hold their meetings here in order to play riddles—to use the popular term."

"Oh, we have the same sort of thing back home, and I know a bit about it, too. Why don't we go in and pay our respects?"

"Since you're so keen, let's all go in," said his companions. After first deferring to each other, they entered the gate. Once inside, they noticed that the eaves of the main hall and the posts of the walkways were strung with a hemp cord to which several hundred slips of Hanglian paper, an inch wide and a foot long, were attached with bamboo pegs. On each slip seven large characters were written, and below them there were some notes in a small hand as well as a red personal seal and a small red stamp with words such as "brush," "ink," "calligraphy," "painting," "letter paper," "inkstone," "tea," and "incense." A number of people were standing about looking at the slips. Some were nodding and hesitating, while others were whispering together in twos and threes. The newcomers walked up to the front of the main hall, where they received a welcome and bowed in response. Then they stood beside the middle steps and gazed upward.

Thirty-two slips were pegged to the hemp cord.² For some time the newcomers stood gazing at the riddles. Lu Shu, who was racking his brains, noticed one that read, "Only gold can help in a crisis" and "New Book" in the annotation below it. "What sort of book is this 'New Book'?" he whispered to Jia Ming.

"It's an almanac."

Lu Shu heard a visitor call out, "I have a suggestion," so he did the same. When someone responded from the main hall, he asked in a loud voice, "Is 'Only gold can help in a crisis' 'No sacrifices on yin days'?"³

"Correct," said the president of the society. He removed the peg from the cord and handed the slip to Lu Shu, and since the red stamp said "writing brush," he also gave him a writing brush. He then replaced the slip with a new one and attached it with the peg.

Lu Shu was looking at other slips when he heard Jia Ming call out: "Is 'Don't lust after women if you want to reduce bad karma' 'No planning, no achievement'?"⁴

"Yes," said the president. He took down the slip and handed it together with a roll of letter paper to Jia Ming, then put up a new slip in its place.

Lu Shu continued to puzzle over the other riddles, but Wu Zhen, who thought the men from the night before might have returned and done

further damage at Qiang Da's, was more concerned about Cassia. He also didn't understand the principle behind the riddles, so he pulled Jia Ming and Lu Shu away. "There's no need to solve all these puzzles, brothers. Come on, let's go."

Jia Ming could hardly ignore him. He bowed to the president and thanked him. "Not at all," replied the president.

They left the guildhall and chatted as they walked along. "The best of the Zhaoyang type is 'Brokenhearted, I ask about my husband's illness,'"⁵ said Jia Ming.

"In the New Composition type there's none better than 'A true heart is handed down to posterity,'"⁶ said Lu Shu.

"Of all the later ones in the Cao E type, none can equal 'Yellow pongee, youthful wife, maternal grandson, ground in a mortar,'"⁷ said Jia Ming. "Nowadays few people use that type."

"In the Su-Huang⁸ type, even the best ones can't equal 'A man of Qi had a wife and a concubine,'" said Lu Shu.

"In Yangzhou these days more people are doing riddles based on direct correspondence," said Jia Ming. "The one you guessed just now was an example of that. But when all's said and done, a riddle is just a riddle,⁹ a minor literary game rather than real scholarship."

The sun was setting as they arrived at Qiang Da's house, still deep in their discussion of riddles. Wu Zhen invited them upstairs, where Sanzi greeted them and invited them into Cassia's room and the maid served tea and replenished the tobacco. Sanzi called all of the courtesans in, and when they had paid their respects, Cassia told a servant to light the opium lamp for Wu Zhen.

"I had four or five puffs after lunch today at the Tianqingtang, and that's enough for me," said Wu Zhen. The guests then asked what had happened the previous night.

"Don't ask!" said Cassia. "Shortly after you left, several dozen men arrived with lots of torches and forced their way in, then smashed up much of the latticework and furniture. We upstairs people took refuge in the cellar, but Miss Lucky, Master Wei's favorite, didn't manage to get away in time. They seized her and grabbed all her hairpins, earrings, and bracelets as well as a silver dollar and a note that she had in her purse. Fortunately there was a man here called Bai who was having an introductory tea, and

he got down on his knees in front of You Deshou and his men and persuaded them to let her go. Master Yu has been to the Parade today to make it up to them by inviting them to a dinner, and the boss has had to pay seven or eight strings of cash to settle the matter. Sister Lucky has been crying continuously since last night. It's a good thing Master Wei is here. Master Wei, do try to calm her nerves by spending a few taels on a little jewelry for her."

Wei Bi glanced at Lucky's disheveled hair, which she had still not combed. "'The wind blows eggshells away / Our money's gone but we are gay.' Tomorrow I'll see that all that jewelry you lost is replaced. What style would you prefer?"

"Oh, whatever appeals to you. I'm not set on any particular style, just so long as I can wear it. I'm not in the least fussy about things like that."

As they were talking, Jia Ming winked at Phoenix and walked out of the room. She caught his meaning and followed him. "Do you have anyone in your room?" he asked.

"No," she said, as she invited him in. Maid Gao offered tea and tobacco. Jia Ming waited until the maid had left before taking six silver dollars from the purse at his waist and handing them to Phoenix. "I hope you won't mind," he said, "but I suspect that those earrings you're wearing are brass and the pendants are imitation jade. Take this money and get someone from the house to buy you a pair of silver earrings and have them gilded, and also a pair of flattened-circle jade pendants. But first he should order you a pair of silver bracelets. With what little is left buy a couple of packets of opium to roast, then try to carry on as best you can. So long as I'm able to afford it, I'll make a practice of helping you out."

"Master Jia," said Phoenix, as she accepted the money, "we've been thrown together purely by chance, you and I, and this generous gift of yours comes just when I need it the most. If I manage to do a little better, I'll certainly remember this."

"Such a little thing, really, it's hardly worth mentioning. There's no need to talk about it in front of other people."

"Oh, I would *never* be so foolish! Would you like to smoke, Master Jia? I'll call someone in to light the lamp."

"There's no need. I won't smoke."

After some casual conversation, they returned to Cassia's room.

At this point Sanzi came in and announced: "Gentlemen! Your host is inviting you to have dinner here this evening."

"Yesterday we were disturbed by those hooligans and scoundrels and weren't able to enjoy ourselves to the full," explained Jia Ming. "Tonight I'll play the host." He turned to Sanzi: "Please order exactly the same dishes as yesterday, and also invite Miss Fragrance over as soon as possible." Sanzi went off to fetch her, while the guests and courtesans bantered and cracked jokes with one another. After some time Fragrance arrived, greeted everybody, and took her seat. Candles were lit and the table set. Each courtesan had her patron, and they sat in the same places as the night before. Then they played guess-fingers, drank wine, sang songs, and enjoyed a boisterous celebration—far more exhilarating than the previous night. By the time they broke up they had thoroughly enjoyed themselves and were pleasantly inebriated.

Lu Shu paid Fragrance for both assignments and also tipped the staff on her behalf. She said her good-byes and insisted that he escort her back. Although he expressed reluctance, in reality he was eager to do so. "Brother Lu," said Jia Ming, "since Miss Fragrance wants you to escort her, why don't you go? We'll meet again tomorrow at the Futura, with those who arrive first waiting for the others."

Lu Shu took his leave and, with Felix in attendance, waited for Fragrance to enter the sedan chair, then followed her to the Jinyulou.

At Qiang Da's house Wu Zhen lay down to smoke on Cassia's bed, and she persuaded him to stay the night. Yuan You, who was rather drunk, declared that he was not going home that night. Wei Bi was invited by Lucky to stay over, and though at first he was reluctant, he later accepted. "We three will all be staying," said Wu Zhen. "I expect Brother Jia will stay, too. Miss Phoenix, why don't you have a word with him?"

"I'm like the fish that was only too willing to be caught on Jiang Taigong's¹⁰ hook," she said. "If Master Jia cares for me, he'll stay even if I don't invite him. But if he doesn't care for me, he won't stay no matter how often I ask him."

"Since my three brothers are staying over, I really should keep them company," said Jia Ming. "But there's something important I need to tell my family, and I simply must go back. There's no need to make a fuss about this, Brother Wu; my friendship with Miss Phoenix is based on a tacit understanding we have, not on whether I stay the night."

"Quite right, Master Jia," said Phoenix. "We understand, we understand, the time is not at hand. There's *plenty* of time! Since Master Jia has serious business to attend to, I wouldn't dream of trying to get him to stay."

"Very touching indeed," commented Jia Ming, proceeding to say his good-byes.

Since he had not brought a page with him, Wu Zhen gave instructions to his own page, Fazi: "Light a torch and escort Master Jia back to his house, then go on home and see that they take care with the fires and candles." Fazi picked up a torch and accompanied Jia Ming. Yuan You and Wei Bi also sent their pages home. Wu Zhen lay down on the bed and satisfied his habit, Paria invited Yuan You into her room, and Lucky invited Wei Bi into hers.

Wei Bi noticed that Lucky's room was furnished in exquisite taste. Six paintings of beauties hung on the walls, as well as a pair of scrolls on apple-green wax paper.

A silken palindrome there was, woven with great skill;
I had a dream of Mount Wu, but no cloud did I see there.

The first line of the attribution said, "Composed by Miss Lucky," while the second line read, "Written by the Layman Who Dreams of Flowers." Lucky asked Wei Bi to take a seat and sent someone off to buy four plates of pastries. She also lit the opium lamp on the bed and invited him to smoke. He took one draw, reluctantly, and then said, "I really don't want to smoke any more." After satisfying her own habit, Lucky washed herself and removed her hairpins and earrings, powdered her face and rubbed some rouge on her lips, and made ready for bed. And there I shall leave her.

Let me turn to Yuan You, who, on entering Paria's room, noticed several pictures of beautiful women on the walls and nothing else. "Why don't you have any scrolls?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm an uncultured sort of person. No one ever gives me any."

"There's no call for such modesty. I'll get you some tomorrow." Since Yuan was rather drunk, he had two cups of hot tea, but his face still felt blazing hot, as if he were about to vomit. He lay down on Paria's bed and told her how dreadful he felt. She sent the maid off to heat up a bowl of vinegar broth, which she handed to him. She herself did not smoke, but

since Yuan You had had too much to drink, she lit the lamp, prepared a pellet, and urged him to do so. But the opium only made him more dizzy than ever. "I really can't anymore," he said. "I feel as if I wanted to vomit. You'd better make up the bed and let me lie down."

Paria at once called in the maid, removed the opium lamp, and helped him to his feet. The maid brushed off the bed and covered it with a thin silk bedspread. Yuan You staggered outside to relieve himself, then undressed and lay down. No sooner had his head hit the pillow than he fell into a deep sleep and began a thunderous snoring. Paria took her time washing herself, removing her jewelry, powdering her face, and rubbing a little rouge on her lips. Then she shut her door and got into bed.

Yuan You's first sleep lasted until well after the second watch, at which time he awoke with his hangover gone. I need not recount in detail what then took place under the bedclothes.

Paria got up and washed herself, then went back to bed and drifted into a sound sleep. She felt that she was holding hands with Yuan You as they strolled about enjoying the scenery. Coming to a garden that was perfectly serene, they noticed an ornamental rock jutting from the ground. It was covered with ancient trees that towered into the sky. Beside it was a tall building, and they climbed up it, still holding hands. At the top they found a tablet with the words "Hall of Romance" inscribed on it in large characters. On each side of the couplet were the lines:

Clouds and rain—how absurd that men never tire of courtesan
love!

Gold and silver—what a shame romantic debts are so hard to repay!

As Paria and Yuan You leaned over the rail enjoying the view, they saw below them a large pond. Red and white lotus flowers covered its greenish waters, as did the blue lotus with its green leaves, among which were many double flowers that were both fragrant and vivid in color. A clear scent wafted up from them. A pair of mandarin ducks were sleeping together on the pond, their heads nestled one against the other. As the two observers took in the scene, the sound of a crossbow rang out from behind the rock, and a single pellet hit the ducks and killed them both.

Startled awake by the sound, Paria found herself bathed in sweat. She heard the watchman's gong down on the street—it was midnight. Yuan was sleeping soundly, and she didn't like to disturb him. As she reviewed the scene from her dream, she feared it did not bode well. A multitude of thoughts assailed her, and suddenly she recalled something. The nun Nirvana from the Temple of the White-Robed outside North Gate had come by the previous day asking for alms. She claimed that the predictions given by the bodhisattva Guanyin in her temple were wonderfully accurate. I don't know what this dream means, thought Paria, or whether it points to a good or a bad future for me. I'll call a sedan chair tomorrow and go over to the temple, where I'll get myself a fortune slip and ask the bodhisattva how my life is going to turn out. She tossed and turned and never did get back to sleep, and when daybreak came, she quickly got up.

By that time Yuan, too, was awake. When he had dressed and washed himself, Paria brought him some of the lotus seeds simmering in the pot and also filled a beaker with tea. Because Yuan had drunk too heavily the day before, he had not had anything for supper, so now he felt quite hungry and really needed his breakfast. As he ate, Wei Bi came in with Lucky, and Wu Zhen with Cassia. They exchanged congratulations, and much joking and laughter ensued. Wei Bi and Wu Zhen urged Yuan to finish dressing and accompany them to the teahouse on the Parade. Cassia and Lucky returned to their own rooms to wash and do their hair.

After Paria had combed her hair and washed herself, she changed into new clothes. She explained to Qiang Da that she wanted to go to a temple to burn incense and asked Sanzi to call her a sedan chair. Then she set out with Maid Wang for the Temple of the White-Robed outside North Gate. Maid Wang rapped on the main gate of the temple, and as Paria stepped out of the sedan chair, two elderly women servants opened the gate and welcomed her in. At the Great Hall, the abbess, whose name in religion was Nirvana, came forward and greeted Paria in Buddhist style. She returned the greeting and asked for some candles and incense, which she lit and burned before the image of the bodhisattva. Kneeling on the prayer mat, she kowtowed several times, then asked the abbess for the fortune container. Holding it up in both hands, she offered this earnest, silent prayer: "Thy disciple was born into a distinguished family, and she deplores the sad fate that has brought her to prostitution. She is seventeen years old, is drifting aimlessly through life, and

is unmarried. She wonders how the rest of her life will turn out. Last night she received a strange portent and does not know whether it bodes well or ill. She has come here today to kneel devoutly before thee and seek thy guidance. If she can escape the sea of woe,¹¹ issue a 'best of the best' fortune to her. If she is destined for a lifetime in the brothel, give her a 'worst of the worst.' In the latter case she is determined to cut off her hair and become a nun. She will definitely not remain very long in the world of romance."

After finishing her prayer, she shook the container until a slip fell onto the ground. She picked it up, kowtowed a few more times, then stood up and handed both container and slip to the abbess, who glanced at it, found the matching fortune in the fortune box, and handed it to Paria. "Congratulations, miss!" said the abbess. "It's the best of the best."

Paria read it:

Prediction no. 81. Best of the best.

If not a marriage bond, it's still a bond;
On heaven depends all your karmic fate.
Seek office or profit, and you'll succeed;
A son you'll bear, and illness will abate.

After she had read the fortune, she put it quickly away. Nirvana invited her to the reception room, where a woman servant poured her a cup of tea and set out a covered tray. After exchanging a few pleasantries with the abbess, Paria took out the incense money and handed it to her. She also gave the servant an envelope containing a hundred cash.

"You rarely come to our little temple, miss," said the abbess. "Today you've favored us with a visit, so we've prepared some coarse plain noodles for you. We hope you'll honor us with your company."

"Thank you ever so much, Your Reverence. I'll come back and impose on you some other time." She stood up and said good-bye. Nirvana saw her to the main gate and waited while she got into her sedan chair, then shut the gate behind her.

Paria returned with Maid Wang to Qiang Da's house, where she paid for the sedan chair and changed back into everyday clothes. Seated in her own room, she took out the fortune and pondered its meaning. My purpose

in seeking a fortune, she thought, was to learn about my future, and the first line of this one speaks of the marriage bond.¹² By an extraordinary coincidence the man I slept with last night is surnamed Yuan, and it was right after sleeping with him that I had that strange dream. Perhaps the words "it's still a bond" mean that the rest of my life should be spent with him? But mandarin ducks symbolize a married couple. If I share a marriage bond with this man Yuan, why were those mandarin ducks killed by a single pellet? Back and forth she went in her mind before she recalled something: husband and wife should be born together and die together. If I have a husband to depend on for the rest of my life, I'd be willing to die at the same time he does, just like those mandarin ducks. It would be better by far than living in this sea of woe! When can I get away from it? But I don't even know if this fellow Yuan is married or not. Or whether he is well enough off. This is the great decision of my life, and I cannot treat it lightly. I'll take my time and sound him out before deciding what to do.

So much for Paria's thoughts. If you are wondering what motive Fragrance might have had for insisting that Lu Shu see her home, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

*A prodigal squanders money on a deflowering,
And a madam seeks a reward for her matchmaking.*

Lu Shu escorted Fragrance back to the Jinyulou, where he took a seat in her room and bantered with her. She sent out for four plates of pastries and made a great fuss of him, biting open the melon seeds and handing him the kernels. As they frolicked about with much fondling and foot play, Lu Shu noticed that the bracelets she was wearing were made of silver. "Why aren't you wearing gold bracelets?" he asked.

"Don't be silly! Do you really think that if I had a pair of gold bracelets I wouldn't want to show them off?"

"What if I were to get you a pair of gold ones tomorrow? Would you like that?"

"We're in a relationship, you and I, and if I dress nicely and wear nice jewelry, it's to your credit as much as mine. Other girls even ask their beaux for clothes and jewelry—it's called making requests. But I'm too tongue-tied and bashful for anything like that; I could never demand anything from anyone. But if out of your love for me you did give me a pair of gold ones and I said I didn't want them, why then, I'd be the silly one!"

"So long as it makes you happy, I'll order them tomorrow."

"If you order gold bracelets, of course it will make me happy. If it didn't, I'd be *really* silly! But there's just one thing; I don't want those cheap imitation ones that use gold plate. If you're going to have them made, get solid

gold, weighing at least eight ounces. Well, there you are, then! I'd be ever so grateful."

"You'll be pleased, I guarantee it."

They went on bantering and frolicking with each other until nearly the fourth watch, when Lu Shu got up to go. Fragrance clung to him and said a great many inconsequential things before she let him leave. She saw him as far as the landing on the top of the staircase, and then, when he had just reached the foot of the stairs, she called him back up again. "What did you want to say to me?" he asked.

At first she said nothing. Then, after some time, she said, "Come earlier tomorrow. I have something important to tell you." He promised to do so, then went downstairs once more and left the Jinyulou with Felix in attendance. A servant from the house escorted them as far as the Tianning Gate and shouted for the gate to open, allowing them to enter the city, while he returned to the brothel.

When Lu Shu arrived at his uncle's house, Felix rapped on the gate. "Oh, you're back, sir," said the servant on the gate. "You've been coming home late recently, and Madam was wondering where you've been. She's questioned me about it several times. Of course, we servants would never dream of saying anything."

"I've put you to a lot of trouble," said Lu Shu. "I'll see you get a good reward for it in the morning."

"Not at all, sir. You're your own master, after all." Lu Shu ignored him and hurried off to the study.

He arose at dawn, washed, and went with Felix to the exchange on Progeny Street. There he traded a quantity of silver for eight ounces of gold, which he took to the jeweler's on New Victory Street to be made into bracelets. He settled on a price for the work and paid over the money. He also gave Felix a hundred cash to get himself something to eat and told him to wait there while the bracelets were made. He himself went along Piney Wind Lane and past the garrison commander's headquarters to the Futura teahouse.

He had arrived too early, and the others were not there, so he had a cup of tea while he waited. After some time Jia Ming came in. The two men greeted each other, and Jia took a seat and had a cup of tea. "After you took Fragrance back last night," said Jia Ming, "the other three stayed over, and

they're still not here. When they come in, let's penalize them by appointing them our hosts for the day." Lu Shu agreed with a faint smile.

After a further wait, the three came in together. "Well, brothers," said Jia Ming as soon as they had taken their seats, "you must have been worn out from your labors last night to sleep in so late. Are Brother Lu and I to congratulate you, or are you going to invite us to be your guests?"

"Enough of your jokes, Brother," said Yuan You. "I'll be the host today."

"So long as I get something to eat, I'll say no more," said Jia Ming to general laughter.

By the time they had had their breakfast and exchanged some casual conversation, it was getting on for noon, and Yuan invited everyone to Qiang Da's for lunch. No sooner were they in the door than he sent Sanzi off to fetch Fragrance. As before, the guests went up to Cassia's room, where tea and tobacco were provided and an opium lamp was lit for Wu Zhen. Before long Fragrance arrived and greeted everyone.

After wine and lunch, they left the table and sat talking and joking until the sun began to set, when Lu Shu noticed Felix standing just outside the door. Leaving the room, he called to Felix to accompany him somewhere away from the others. "I had the people at the money shop check the weight, and it's exactly right," said Felix, as he handed over the bracelets.

Lu Shu nodded, glanced at the gold bracelets, put them in his sleeve, and returned to Cassia's room. From his seat next to Fragrance, he caught hold of her hand and, unseen by anyone, slipped the bracelets into it. She understood and quickly tucked them away.

That evening, when the party broke up, Jia Ming and Wei Bi returned home, while Wu Zhen and Yuan You stayed the night. Once more Fragrance insisted that Lu Shu take her home. At the Jinyulou, he called for the servant who had escorted him the night before and enabled him to get through the gate. He thanked the man for his trouble and rewarded him with a tael.

He then asked Fragrance to take off her silver bracelets and put on the gold ones. Chatting and laughing together, they amused themselves until the fourth watch, when Lu Shu got up to leave. The same servant escorted him to the gate and saw him through it.

The next day Lu Shu invited everyone back to Qiang Da's. He had Fragrance brought over and ordered lunch and dinner. The party went on

all day, and when it broke up, some of them stayed the night, while others went home.

It would be tedious to describe in detail how the brothers ate and drank together every day and partied together every evening. Instead let me tell of Yuan You's promise to give Paria a pair of scrolls. On reflection, it occurred to Yuan that he was none too familiar with literary composition and would not be able to come up with a matching couplet, so he sought the help of several highly cultivated friends. However, Paria's name proved too difficult to find a parallel for, and after several days they simply dashed off a couple of lines and gave them to Yuan. With no idea of their quality, he bought two pairs of mounted scrolls and sent them to the calligrapher's to have the characters properly written and the attributions added, then rushed excitedly over to Paria's. She opened the first pair and read them:

The brush traces her brows; she has finished her springtime slumber;
The mirror reflects her face; she is late with her toilette.

She gave a sour smile. "It doesn't matter so much that you've changed my name,¹ but the whole world knows of us prostitutes as fallen flowers. You make that ever so clear in your couplet—you're holding me up to ridicule!"

"To tell you the truth, I'm not much of a writer. I couldn't write a couplet myself, so I got someone to do it for me. If I ever had the slightest intention of ridiculing you, let me die some horrible death! But tell me this, just how did that couplet liken you to a fallen flower?"

"Don't pretend to be so concerned! Let me ask you this: once those caltrop flowers² are exposed to frost, don't they wither and fall?"

At these words, Yuan flung the scrolls aside. "You can blame me for being crude," he said, "but that thought never even crossed my mind. Now, don't be angry." He unrolled the second pair of scrolls and showed them to her.

The snow fills the twin peaks where the hermit lies;
The moon shines on the forest floor when Beauty comes.

Paria looked at the couplet and said nothing, just flung herself down on the bed and began sobbing hysterically. Yuan You, who had no idea why

she was so upset, sat on the edge of the bed and asked her what the trouble was. When she wouldn't say, he became agitated himself. "Whatever it is, how will I know if you won't tell me? Oh, it's enough to drive a man to his grave!"

"Master Yuan, you don't need to put on a false show of concern for my benefit! You made a big mistake; you thought I asked you for a pair of scrolls because I was worried about my image. It's no wonder you made fun of me."

"You told me that the words 'frost' and 'caltrop' in the first couplet meant that you were being likened to a fallen flower. However, in this second couplet—well, I may be crude and shallow and have little understanding of these things, but those lines come straight from the *Thousand Poems*.³ I told the man who composed them that your name had to be included, so he simply replaced 'in the mountains' with 'twin peaks.' I can't imagine how that could offend you so much as to make you as angry as this."

"It's *precisely* the words 'snow fills the twin peaks' that make me angry. Now, just think about what I'm going to say. If you hadn't been telling wild stories to other people, how would that man who wrote the couplet ever know such a private thing about me? How would he know to mock me with the lines 'A winding path leads to the secret place / Twin peaks line each side of the tiny stream'?"⁴ She began crying again.

Yuan You still did not understand. He kept repeating the words "snow fills the twin peaks" over and over again, tugging at his ear lobe and scratching his head, as perplexed as ever. Paria seized his ear and twisted it, then whispered something into it. At last he understood. He got to his feet and took both pairs of scrolls and tore them to shreds, then bowed deeply before Paria and tried to comfort her, swearing numerous oaths and taking numerous vows. Eventually she stopped crying.

Taking her hand, Yuan You led her back to Cassia's room. The others were all there, and they said it was time for dinner. Sanzi was again sent off to fetch Fragrance, and after supper she was again escorted back by Lu Shu.

They met daily over the course of many days. Fragrance requested goodness knows how much clothing and jewelry from Lu Shu, who invariably obliged, spending an untold amount of money on her. The owner of the Jinyulou, Mother Xiao, together with Cloud, Lute, and the senior staff also made numerous requests.

Fragrance was impressed by Lu Shu's youth, good looks, gentle manner of speech, and free-spending ways. She was now fifteen, she reflected, had spent several years in the brothels, and had some knowledge of life—how could she help adoring him! When they met, she would lavish endearments upon him, and pet and cuddle, although they could not consummate the affair for fear that they might be seen. Lu Shu, who had been in love with her all along, could not endure her flirtatious ways and ached unbearably for her.

One day he was in Fragrance's room chatting with the others when Mother Xiao came in and greeted them all. Fragrance quickly got to her feet. "Godmother, please take a seat."

"No need to be so formal," said Mother Xiao as she sat down. "What luck to find all of you gentlemen here! There's something I need to tell you."

"What's that?" they asked.

"The other day Master Lu asked me to find out about Miss Fragrance's celebration,⁵ and it so happened that yesterday her uncle came by. I've had several discussions with him, and he's now put a price of fifty taels on the deflowering. In addition, he wants a gold hairpin, a pair of gold rings, a gown made of imported crepe silk, a pleated skirt of imported crepe silk, a gown of Hangzhou gauze, and a pleated skirt of the same material, all to provide Fragrance with a change of clothes. He also wants to have bed curtains made of imported print, valences of crimson imported crepe, and new bedding. If Master Lu is willing to do as her uncle wants, he can set a date for the celebration. I can't tell you how much persuasion it took to work out this agreement. I wonder what you think of it, Master Lu?"

Lu Shu was overjoyed to hear that an agreement had been reached, and he readily accepted without calculating the cost.

"Master Lu," continued Mother Xiao, "it was only with great difficulty and after countless arguments that I managed to get Miss Fragrance's uncle to agree, and now you have your heart's desire. Well, that's that! Miss Fragrance's celebration will be held here. I hope that you will consider how best to reward me."

"Whatever you want, I'll see that you get it."

"I'm nearly seventy. The year before last my daughter had a client who was a guard on a grain transport. He brought me a set of sandalwood

boards, which have been made into a passable coffin and given three coats of lacquer. Now, if you would help out by giving me thirty taels, I would take advantage of the fact that this is an intercalary year to have the burial garments made. Well! That would provide me with a good ending to a hard life. May you and our Miss Fragrance be blessed with a lifetime of happiness!"

At these words the guests began laughing. "That's a small matter," said Lu Shu. "Just leave it to me."

Mother Xiao laughed aloud. "Master Lu, you're a big player and no mistake. Let me thank you in advance."

Lu Shu turned to Fragrance. "You should speak to the tailor yourself about the clothes and bedding. Order whatever kinds you like and work out with him how much it will come to. Tomorrow I'll bring you the money to give him. As for the jewelry, I'll order it myself and bring it over." Calling for a calendar, he chose the first of the fifth month, a lucky day, for the celebration. To Mother Xiao he said, "I've decided on the first of the fifth. Please ask the cook to prepare a banquet on that day. All of the staff, men and women, will be needed. The food must be of the finest quality and also sumptuous, regardless of cost. I'll be responsible for all the expenses."

He turned to his sworn brothers. "I hope very much that on the first you will all attend with your favorites for a full day's celebration."

"Of course we will. We'll want to congratulate you."

It was time to light the candles. Lu Shu arranged a banquet and invited them all. Afterward they left the Jinyulou and entered the city through the Tianning Gate. At the crossroads he took leave of the others and, with Felix in attendance, went back by way of North Willow Lane.

The other four went on to Qiang Da's on Ninth Lane. As they entered, Wu Zhen asked which rooms were free. "They're all free," said Sanzi. "You can go to any one you like." Wu Zhen heard talk and laughter coming from Cassia's room and invited the others there.

They found Cassia, Paria, Phoenix, and Lucky playing cards. At sight of the men, they threw down their cards, scooped up the cash they had been playing for, and rose and greeted their guests.

"Go on with your game!" said Jia Ming. "We'll stand beside you and watch."

"We were just playing about," said Phoenix. "It's nothing. Now that you're here, we can't possibly go on."

By this time the maid had gathered up the cards and moved the table back to its original position. She now invited the guests to sit down and offered them tea and tobacco. "Have you had any supper, gentlemen?"

"We've just come from supper at Miss Fragrance's," said Wu Zhen. "But do hurry up and light the opium lamp. I want to smoke." She did so, and Wu Zhen lay down as Cassia prepared the opium. Jia Ming and Phoenix were whispering together about something, while Yuan You joked with Paria and Wei Bi with Lucky.

Some time later, they heard the sound of rain falling more and more heavily outside the window. Sanzi came in and said, "It's nearly midnight, and it's pouring outside. You can't possibly go back tonight."

"Miss Phoenix and Brother Jia are still in the process of forming a relationship," said Wu Zhen. "By a lucky chance heaven is playing the part of a matchmaker. We'll stay here and keep our brother company."

With the rain pelting down, Jia Ming could hardly reject the suggestion. Wu Zhen told Sanzi to order the pages to go back. Then the brothers escorted Jia Ming to Phoenix's room, where they engaged in a little horseplay before returning to their own favorites.

Phoenix had a maid light the opium lamp and invited Jia Ming to smoke. "Xue, the tailor, was to make you two short gowns and two pairs of trousers," he said. "Has he delivered them yet?"

From her wickerwork chest Phoenix took out a short gown of white pongee with an embroidered silk collar piece, another short gown of white silk with a blue-green embroidered collar piece, a pair of blue nankeen trousers, and a pair of black silk trousers and handed the clothes to Jia Ming. "He brought these over this afternoon and told me that you had ordered them. I've received so many kindnesses from you I feel quite embarrassed."

"Mere trifles," said Jia Ming. "Look, from now on let's dispense with the clichés." He asked her to put the clothes away again.

She led him to the bed, where she prepared two or three pellets and offered them to him, then satisfied her own habit. From a drawer in her dressing table she produced a plate of cakes made with egg and a plate of fruitcakes, of which Jia Ming ate a little.

She washed herself, removed the opium lamp, smoothed out the bed, folded up the bedclothes, and urged Jia Ming to undress and lie down. Then she shut the door and joined him in bed.

If you are wondering what they did inside the bedclothes, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWELVE

*Yan Xiang extorts part of a dragon boat's rent;
Fragrance has her first taste of sexual passion.*

Because Jia Ming had several times given Phoenix money and bought her opium, and also had a quantity of clothing made for her, she felt particularly grateful. This was also the first time he had spent a night in the brothel, so she showed off all her secret bedroom techniques and tried to gratify him in every conceivable way. It was not until dawn that they fell into a sound sleep, still locked in each other's arms.

Wei Bi was the first up in the morning. He rushed over to Phoenix's room, pushed open the door, tiptoed over to the bed, and pulled aside the bed curtain. He noticed that Phoenix's right arm was outside the bedclothes cradling Jia Ming's head, and that the two lay face-to-face, sound asleep.

"What a loving scene!" he murmured.

Phoenix awoke, rubbed her eyes, and said, "Master Wei, why aren't you asleep? What are you doing up so early?" At the sound of her voice, Jia Ming also woke up.

"With Miss Lucky and me it's a case of 'the Prince of Spring lasts a single month, the Son of Heaven ten thousand years.'¹ Old couples like us get honest-to-goodness sleep, unlike newlyweds such as you and Brother Jia, who are hard at work all night and then go on sleeping until now."

"Leave off the fun and games, Brother. Close the curtain so we can get up."

Wei Bi did so, and Jia Ming and Phoenix put on their underwear and got out of bed. Then Wu Zhen and Yuan You burst into the room, bandying jokes with each other and urging Jia Ming to wash and get dressed. Phoenix brought in a bowl of baked lotus seeds and said to the other guests as she put it into Jia Ming's hands, "I assumed you three would have had your breakfast, so I didn't ask you if you wanted any."

"These lotus seeds were prepared for our brother," said Yuan You. "We don't have the same sort of luck. But do go ahead and eat."

"Forgive me for starting first," said Jia Ming. He ate half of the lotus seeds and passed the bowl back to Phoenix, then left the room with the other guests. When they reached the courtyard, he turned back and went up to Phoenix's room, where he took two silver dollars from the purse at his belt and gave them to her for minor expenses. As he was leaving the second time, she called him back. "What do you want to say?" he asked.

She found herself unable to say whatever she had had on her mind. After racking her brains, she said, "Come back as soon as you can. We'll talk about it then." Jia Ming promised to do so and left with the others to have tea and pastries at the Futura teahouse.

Some two hours after the guests had left, Yan Xiang, You Deshou, and four or five of their followers, the men who had made trouble before, came swaggering into Qiang Da's house. Sanzi didn't dare express the anger that he felt but welcomed them cheerfully and invited them into Paria's room, where he offered them tea. He also called for the maid to fill their pipes and summoned several courtesans to keep them company. The courtesans addressed the men as godfathers and politely asked their names, and they in turn asked the courtesans their names. Once the introductions were over, Sanzi handed Phoenix a lute. "Miss Phoenix, choose a nice song for these godfathers."

Adjusting the strings, she said, "I'm afraid I don't sing well. I hope you'll bear with me," to which they replied that they were looking forward to hearing her. Accompanying herself on the lute, she sang a "Nanjing Air":

Disturbed by spring, I cannot sleep;
My heart is filled with care.
The lamp is all I have for company.
I hear a sound, but it's only the cat

Driving me to despair.
 No word from my cruel lover!
 Sound sleep escapes me;
 Pleasant dreams elude me.
 How I hate that heaven above!
 My fortunes never come to be.

As she finished, she said, "Very poor, I'm afraid," but her audience cried out "Bravo!" Someone relieved her of the lute.

"Call the owner," said Yan Xiang. "There's something we want to talk to him about."

"He's gone out to a teahouse," said Sanzi. "If you have a message for him, just tell me, and I'll pass it on to him when he gets back."

"It's nothing, just that we've taken a fancy to a multicolored gold dragon boat at the Tianshou Temple dock and have put your house down for an eight-dollar share of the rent. We're counting on this particular boat. It's in a different class from the others, for which eighteen hundred cash would have been enough. We need to hear from your owner to know if we can go ahead with it."

"I'll tell him as soon as he gets back. I'm sure he'll agree."

"If he wants to see us, we'll be at the Bamboo Heater tomorrow. If he doesn't, well, so be it." He stood up and left, followed by his men.

Sanzi at once began railing at them to the courtesans. "That affair the other day cost us a lot of money, and now, with the ink scarcely dry on the agreement, they have the nerve to come back here first thing in the morning and start throwing their weight about! I wonder when someone will just happen to investigate *their* affairs and have a little fun with *them*. That's when we'll see just what those horns they're always tooting are really made of."

Because they had been sitting in her room, once they had gone, Paria lit a couple of sheets of toilet paper.

When Qiang Da returned, Sanzi told him what Yan Xiang had said, and naturally he again called in Yu Jiafu to deal with the matter.

Meanwhile the sworn brothers had arrived at the Futura teahouse and found Lu Shu already there. He got up to welcome them, and they joined him and chatted idly over breakfast. Lu Shu asked them to accompany

him to the exchange on Progeny Street to buy gold, which he took to the silversmith's on New Victory Street to be made into hairpins and rings. Again he told Felix to wait there for them. After that, he invited the others to the Jinyulou, where they went up to Fragrance's room. Cloud and Lute came in to keep them company.

"The tailor has given me the total cost," Fragrance told Lu Shu, "but he needs to be paid in advance. He can deliver the clothes and bedding by the end of the month."

"Felix has two packets of money with him," said Lu Shu. "I told him just now to see to work on the jewelry. He'll be here shortly, and I'll get him to give you the money. The lighter packet weighs thirty ounces. You should give that to the tailor right away. I'll make up any shortfall tomorrow. The other is fifty ounces. Take it and give it to your uncle, so that he can go back as soon as possible. The silver is all top grade, in tribute ingots.² I've checked it myself, and it's exactly right."

"I don't know anything about weights," said Fragrance. "Let's talk about that some other time." Lu Shu smiled. He persuaded his sworn brothers to stay, and they spent the whole day there drinking.

Time flew by, and soon it was the first of the fifth month. That morning Lu Shu and his brothers ate their breakfast in the Futura teahouse, visited the bathhouse for a bath and a head shave, and then went on to the Jinyulou, where they were shown into Lute's room. The brothers congratulated Lu Shu and told their pages to offer him their presents. Mother Xiao, Lute, and Cloud gave him tall wax candles and benzoin incense, while the senior staff brought him a large sandalwood rosary with a jeweled cover and colored tassels and also a painting of a sleeping beauty. Cassia, Phoenix, Paria, and Lucky from Qiang Da's house each sent a present. Lu Shu received the presents and tipped the servants who had brought them, then sent for the four courtesans. After a considerable wait, Phoenix and Paria arrived by sedan chair. They congratulated Lu Shu, greeted the others, and joined them, explaining that Cassia and Lucky had other engagements and could not come in person; they sent their congratulations and hoped that Lu Shu would not be offended. "If they can't come today, let's invite them tomorrow," he said. He gave Mother Xiao the various sums promised to her, and also reimbursed her and the others in the house for the cost of their presents. Mother Xiao was delighted and stowed the money safely away.

After lunch she told the maid who dressed Fragrance's hair to do it up in a fashionable chignon style. Fragrance changed her hairpins and rings, inserted fresh flowers in her hair clasp, and dressed up in new clothes from head to foot. The garments and jewelry were all things Lu Shu had bought for her. When she had finished dressing, Mother Xiao led her into the room to meet the guests.

"Now, there's real beauty for you!" exclaimed Jia Ming. "She looks like the goddess of the moon come down to earth or some divine maiden joining our world. Girls always look prettier with their hair up; even a perfect beauty loses something when she's dressed as a boy." Fragrance felt a little embarrassed in front of all the people, and although the other courtesans teased her, she said nothing.

That evening the guests were invited into Fragrance's room. They noted that, although it didn't resemble a wedding chamber, it was decorated in gorgeous colors, with brocaded and embroidered bedding and coverlets. An aromatic scent hung in the air, and on the dressing table several pairs of tall wax candles burned. Inside the bed curtain was a painting of a sleeping beauty, and on the walls were several other paintings of beautiful women as well as calligraphic scrolls, including one pair of "Myriad Years of Happiness" with a border of yellow silk that Jia Ming had recently sent:

To her moon palace she invites the laureate alone;
In her fragrant room she meets the one who plucks the flower.³

The first attribution read, "Composed and Written to Congratulate Miss Fragrance on Her Happy Occasion," and the second read, "Presented by the Master of the Kingfisher-Blue Studio."

In the middle of the room was a round table, and Lu Shu now invited his guests to take their places at it. A banquet was served, and they drank and played guess-fingers. They also played the game of Flowing Cups⁴ and managed to get Lu Shu rather drunk. Not until they had all thoroughly enjoyed themselves and drunk their fill did the party come to an end. Jia Ming and Yuan You paid the tips for Phoenix and Paria, who said good-bye and got into their sedan chairs. Lu Shu sent someone to buy pastries and also to light the benzoin incense and give it to the pages to hold as they

followed the sedan chairs. The brothers took their leave of Lu Shu and saw Phoenix and Paria back to Qiang Da's.

Meanwhile the maid removed the leftovers, wiped the table, made some strong tea, and heated some vinegar broth and gave it to Lu Shu for his hangover. She also handed him a piece of white silk. "Congratulations, Master Lu! Here is the First Graduate's Seal." He put it beside the bed.

It was now nearly midnight. The maid tidied up the bed, and Lu Shu and Fragrance undressed and lay down. He was a rake who frequented brothels, and she was a girl who had lived much of her life in them. He had spent a great deal of money on her, but by this time he was so befuddled with drink that he never did learn whether she was a virgin or not. This was the first time they slept together, and their desire for each other was so strong that the lovemaking continued until their passion was utterly spent.

The nights are short on such joyous occasions, and the sun was high in the sky by the time they dressed and got up. The maid came in and congratulated them, bringing water for Lu Shu to wash his face and Fragrance to rinse out her mouth. She also brought in two bowls of baked Hua'an lotus seeds sweetened with crystal sugar for the couple to eat, and Lu Shu rewarded her with a tael. Then the hairdresser came in to congratulate them, and she, too, was rewarded with a tael. She thanked Lu Shu and combed out Fragrance's hair. Then the flower seller brought in a flower clasp and four fresh-cut flowers and congratulated the couple, and Lu Shu rewarded her, too, with a tael. Fragrance did her hair, washed her face, applied rouge and powder, then put on the clasp with the flowers, finished dressing, and ate her breakfast with Lu Shu. As they were eating, Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, Yuan You, and Wei Bi came in together and offered their congratulations. Lu Shu invited them to sit down, and they cracked a number of jokes with Fragrance. Lu Shu also sent someone to Qiang Da's to ask Cassia and Lucky to join them. When the food was ready, he invited everyone to lunch.

Afterward, when they had washed their hands and faces, Cassia and Lucky suggested an outing to the East Garden of Tianning Temple and other places. The four sworn brothers took Cassia, Lucky, Cloud, and Lute to visit the shrines at the back of the temple, after which they went on to the animal sanctuary. There they had to give a good deal of money to the priest in charge before he would open the gate and let them in. They

found a number of elderly oxen and pigs, as well as sheep, geese, chickens, and ducks, and hastily sent someone off to buy wheat cakes and steamed dumplings, then tossed the food toward the animals and laughed heartily as they fought over it. After amusing themselves there for some time, they went out of the temple gate and visited the Duke Shi⁵ Shrine in the East Garden. When they had seen everything there, they left the shrine and went out by the main gate. Cassia took Wu Zhen by the hand and wanted to continue their excursion to the east, but he said, "There's nothing worth seeing in that direction. If you follow the canal, it will bring you to the Bianyi Gate, which is where the boats from your hometown dock." They went back to the Jinyulou, had afternoon tea, and stayed for supper. Wu Zhen and Wei Bi paid the tips for Cassia and Lucky, respectively, and they all took leave of Lu Shu. The four sworn brothers saw Cassia and Lucky back to Qiang Da's.

Once more Lu Shu spent the night with Fragrance. It was as if they were blissfully married—perfectly matched and quite inseparable. He told her of his wish to take her home, and she swore oath after oath that she would gladly marry him. Once the price had been agreed with her uncle on his next visit to Yangzhou, she said, she would go back with him. And so Lu Shu continued to be blinded by passion and for three days did not leave the brothel.

Soon it was the Duanyang Festival. Yangzhou has a tendency toward extravagant display, especially with regard to the dragon boat contests, and Fragrance expressed a desire to see them. "I arrived here only this year," she said, "and I've never been. Do let's go." Lu Shu agreed to hire a boat.

On the morning of the fourth Mother Xiao came upstairs and said to Lu Shu, "Sir, there's something I need to consult you about. We're celebrating the festival, and in addition to the expenses, there are presents we have to give as well as bills to pay,⁶ and I would like to ask you for some money to tide us over."

As Lu Shu nodded, Fragrance interjected, "Don't talk about festival expenses, godmother! I have ever so many debts myself! I owe the tailor so much, the flower seller so much, the shoemaker so much, the jeweler so much, the jade merchant so much, and the fruiterer so much. I also need to buy a few small things for you and your family as well as the staff. I need a whole lot just to get by."

"Don't worry your head over such trivial sums," said Lu Shu. "When Felix arrives, I'll tell him to go back and fetch some money to help you with the festival expenses."

"He's here already, waiting downstairs," said Mother Xiao.

"Then send him up so that I can give him instructions." She went down to do so.

"Go off at once and invite Masters Jia, Wu, Yuan, and Wei," he told Felix. "Tell them I'm waiting for them." He also whispered some instructions in Felix's ear.

After some time the four men arrived together. Lu Shu stood up and greeted them, as did Fragrance. The maid served tea and replenished the tobacco. "The reason I've invited you," said Lu Shu, "is that Fragrance would like to watch the dragon boats tomorrow, and since I'm not familiar with the local customs, I'd like to ask you for your advice. I want to hire a large boat and invite your favorites along as well as yourselves."

"Pleasure boats in Yangzhou are at their most expensive during the Dragon Boat Festival, the Guanyin Festival, and the Festival of Ghosts,"⁷ said Jia Ming. "And there's one other thing," he added, pointing at Fragrance and the other courtesans. "With them on board, as soon as the people in the dragon boats set eyes on them, they'll want to compete for prizes. This outing is going to cost you several dozen taels."

"Well, so be it. I'm celebrating the Duanyang in your fair city, and with glorious spectacles like this on hand, of course I want to admire them. It's the excitement of the occasion that I'm interested in. What does it matter if I spend a few extra taels here and there?" Jia Ming did not care to raise any further objections.

"Since Brother Lu is so keen," said Wu Zhen, turning to Yuan You, "why don't you and I go down to the dock today and reserve a boat? Otherwise we might find that there aren't any left tomorrow, which would be a terrible disappointment."

"I'd be greatly obliged if you would go," said Lu Shu.

Wu Zhen and Yuan You left the Jinyulou and went out through the main gate of the Scripture Repository. "If you want to be a big man in the pleasure quarter, you have to throw your money about," said Wu Zhen, "but I think the way Brother Lu is carrying on is more than a little foolish. In order to take Miss Fragrance's maidenhead, he lavished money on

clothes and jewelry that, by my calculations, must have come to almost two hundred taels. I just wonder how much more it will cost him to buy her out and marry her. When you consider that he came to Yangzhou just to visit his relatives, and that he hasn't done any business here, where on earth is he going to find the money?"

"Ever since he came and we held that brotherhood ceremony, he's been putting on a daily round of parties and entertainments. I've never had a really detailed discussion with him."

As they talked, they came to the drawbridge at the Tianning Gate. A boatman whom they had known a long time hailed them: "Going out for a little fun, gentlemen?"

"Not today," said Wu Zhen, "but we do need a big boat for tomorrow. How much would it be?"

"With you two gentlemen, I can't beat about the bush. To be frank, it'll come to twelve dollars excluding tips." Wu Zhen offered him four dollars, which the boatman refused. In the end, after much bargaining, they agreed on six dollars including luncheon, tea, and charcoal but excluding tips for the staff. "I really shouldn't ask you for this, but tomorrow's the fifth, and it'll be jam-packed here. Now that we've settled on a price, if anyone else comes along and wants to hire the boat, even if he offers me my price in gold, I'll still have to refuse. I'd like you to put down a couple of dollars now as a deposit. Oh, and one other thing: no cancellations on account of bad weather!"

"Of course not," said Wu Zhen. "I'll have someone bring over two dollars for the deposit." The boatman nodded.

"Brother, there's something I'd like to talk to you about," said Wu Zhen, drawing Yuan You aside to a secluded spot in the Tianning Temple grounds. "The way young Lu is behaving, he's sure to squander everything he's got. Ever since he came here, we've been out with the great man every day, but like the soy sauce we dip the pigs' knuckles in, sooner or later his money is going to run out. You and I are not as well situated as Brothers Jia and Wei, with their connections to the Salt Administration. We don't have the spare cash to go out on the town. There are certainly going to be some expenses at Qiang Da's over the festival, and I'm really hard up at present. I was thinking, why don't we add a few dollars to the cost of the

boat and the prizes tomorrow, in order to tide us over the holidays? What do you say?"

Yuan You hesitated. I feel indebted to Lu Shu and his father for a great many favors in Changshu, he thought. How can I cheat him now that he's here in Yangzhou? But if I don't go along with Brother Wu, I'm afraid that, having put forward the suggestion, he will be offended. On the other hand, if I do agree, I'm sure to suffer from a bad conscience. Then another thought struck him: In any case, sooner or later Lu Shu is bound to come to grief. If one of these days he's squandered all of his money and doesn't have the fare to get home, I'll give him a few extra dollars to make up for this. "All right, I'll go along with you," he said. Now that their plan had been agreed on, the two men returned to the Jinyulou and went up to Fragrance's room.

Lu Shu sprang to his feet the moment he saw them come in. "I'm ever so grateful to you both! Did you manage to hire one?"

"Those men in charge of the pleasure boats are dreadful!" said Wu Zhen. "I can't tell you how much haggling we had to do before we could reserve one for a base price of sixteen dollars, excluding tea, charcoal, luncheon, and tips. The man also insisted that we put down ten dollars as a deposit. And if it rains tomorrow, even if we never set foot on the boat, we'll still have to pay the full amount."

Lu Shu bowed to them both. "Just because I wanted to enjoy myself, I've given you all this trouble!" He took ten silver dollars from the purse at his waist and handed them to Wu Zhen, who went downstairs and gave two to his page and told him in private to go to the dock and hand them to the boatman as a deposit. Then he went back upstairs.

"You said the dragon boats would want to compete for prizes," said Lu Shu. "I don't quite understand. I'd be much obliged if you'd see to that, too."

"Brother Yuan and I will do our best," said Wu Zhen. "Today you should fill some envelopes with cash for the boys who'll be on the stern of the dragon boats tomorrow."

"We must also invite the other courtesans to join us," said Lu Shu. He called a servant to light the opium lamp for Wu Zhen and invited them all to stay for lunch. After that they took their leave, having arranged to meet early the next morning at the Jinyulou.

The others left for Qiang Da's, where each told his favorite about Lu Shu's invitation to watch the dragon boats the following day. The courtesans were elated and at once began getting their clothes and jewelry ready for an early start in the morning.

Please turn to the next chapter to learn what happened.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*Fragrance¹ watches the dragon boats at the festival;
Lu Shu puts on a nighttime feast for her birthday.*

By the fourth of the month Lu Shu had completed all of the arrangements for the excursion Fragrance had asked for. On the morning of the fifth, he paid his respects to his uncle and aunt and, on the pretext that he had been invited to celebrate the festival at a friend's house, hurried off to the Jinyulou, where Mother Xiao and the staff offered him compliments of the season. He then went upstairs to Fragrance's room. She, too, offered him her compliments, and the maid served him tea and tobacco. Fragrance told the maid to unwrap a quantity of dumplings² and herself picked up a small multicolored plate of fine porcelain filled with rose flower syrup preserved in refined sugar and invited Lu Shu to eat some dumplings with it. When he had eaten one, she speared another one with a chopstick, dipped it in the syrup, and then, taking half of it between her teeth, put her mouth to his and transferred the other half to him. They were in the midst of this game when the four sworn brothers came into the room, and they quickly swallowed the dumpling. Compliments were exchanged, and Fragrance invited them to share the dumplings. She also told a servant to light the opium lamp for Wu Zhen.

Fragrance began hastily to dress herself, and when she had finished, Jia Ming said, "Let's go down. I'm afraid the others may arrive before we do, and they won't know which boat to board." Fragrance invited Mother Xiao, Cloud, and Lute to come with them. When they arrived at the dock,

they walked down the stone ramp to the boat. On boarding, they noticed that on the afterdeck several cooks were engaged in slaughtering chickens and ducks in preparation for the feast. The guests then took seats in the cabin and chatted together. After a while, Phoenix, Cassia, Paria, and Lucky arrived in their sedan chairs, with Sanzi and the maids following on foot. The men at once went ashore, and each of them helped his favorite to board. For this occasion the courtesans wore gorgeous clothes and brilliant jewelry. Compliments were exchanged, and the order was given to start.

The boatman cast off, pulled up the gangway, and began to work the sweep oar. He brought the boat past Rainbow Bridge, and at Little Gold Hill they went ashore and strolled about enjoying themselves. The pomegranates were a fiery red and the artemisia a delicate green. Lu Shu and Wei Bi gambled and won a large number of Water Mice and Yellow Mists,³ which they brought back to the boat to celebrate with.

By the time they had had their lunch, pleasure craft large and small were plying their way back and forth in great numbers, and the air was filled with the sound of gongs and drums, while in the distance the pennants of the boats were so numerous that they obscured the light of the sun. Dragon boats of various colors came flying in their direction. Two of them had awnings like those on foreign-style buildings, and both awnings were spanking new. Over their sterns hung what appeared to be young boys. The fellows standing at the dragon's head wore brilliant clothes, and from their belts hung foreign watches, penknives, purses, fan cases, kerchiefs, and so forth. On their heads they wore the latest style of tasseled summer hat and on their feet the latest style of satin boot. They were young, their clothes were new, their feet were planted firmly on the boat—they looked supremely handsome. On a few other dragon boats the awnings, although not new, were still brightly colored. To the stern of each boat a sheet of colored cloth was attached. A small red wooden bar was fastened to it, and on each bar sat a ten- or eleven-year-old boy. The boys' hair was drawn up in two tufts on top of their heads with crimson tassels hanging down on each side. They wore pale pink nankeen tunics, jade green silk trousers, and sandals but no socks. Of the fellows standing at the dragon's head, some wore medium-blue unlined crepe-silk robes; some wore dark-brown unlined pongee robes; others wore unlined robes of Suzhou-blue cotton cloth; and still others wore gowns fastened with belts.

There was one dragon boat with multicolored pennants of which the red had turned black and the white yellow, no doubt because it had only a few days before been released from the pawnbroker's and still bore the marks⁴ of its detention. The boy at the stern had on a pair of well-worn trousers. The fellow standing at the dragon's head was in his twenties. He had on a red straw sun hat with red tassels that he wore at a rakish angle. His tunic was of pale pink nankeen embroidered all around with black silk thread in a lamp grass pattern and fastened with red-bean and walnut-style buttons. Over it he wore a sleeveless jacket, no longer new, of medium-blue silk lined with white imported cloth. He also wore white nankeen trousers fastened by a belt of crimson nankeen and light-green silk, and a pair of worn over trousers of pine green imported crepe lined with crimson pongee. The feet of the over trousers still bore traces of where the broad, embroidered hibiscus trim had been removed. He wore flared lined socks of white Shanghai cotton and thin-soled leather shoes with images in reddish blue satin of the Eight Treasures. On his left thumb he wore an archery ring of imitation emerald, and on his left wrist a green porcelain armlet. In his right hand he held a black oilpaper fan with a black bamboo spine on which were depicted the one hundred and eight warriors of *Outlaws of the Marshes*. This young man stood in the prow of the dragon boat, fanning himself constantly, watching the people in the passing boats, and throwing out challenges to a contest.

There were nine dragon boats in all. Behind them was a small open boat with two bamboo baskets containing a dozen or more live ducks. There were also several large boats on whose bows were pairs of tall lanterns glued together from yellow paper depicting dragons in a variety of colors. The red lettering stuck onto the pictures of the dragons read, "By Imperial Appointment Pacifier of the Waves and Bringer of Children, the (such and such a color) Dragon." Inside the cabins were incense altars with paper offerings dedicated to the image of the Crown Prince Spirit. There were also ten-piece bands and troupes from Suzhou popularly known as Mashang-zhuang,⁵ who played their instruments and sang both grand opera as well as Xipi and Erhuang in the cabins.

The nine dragon boats went back and forth between Little Gold Hill and Lotus Flower Bridge, followed by the rowboats full of spectators. The large boat that Lu Shu and his friends were in had stopped by East Peak

of Little Gold Hill, but it was not long before the fellow on the prow of one of the dragon boats noticed their boat moored there and realized that one of the passengers was the man who had deflowered Fragrance. He at once told his front oar to take two strokes to the right, bringing the dragon boat alongside, then hailed the passengers while his companions struck up their gongs and drums. The boy on his red bar at the stern began his acts, such as "The Red Boy Bows Low before Guanyin,"⁶ "The Carp Falls Back Three Times,"⁷ and "Zhang Fei Sells Meat."⁸ When he had finished, the passengers handed out envelopes of cash. After that, all of the dragon boats with boys on the stern came alongside and had their boys perform.

The boat with the ducks also drew alongside, and two men leapt from it onto their prow, hailed the passengers, and called out to Fragrance: "Miss Fragrance, we've come specially to offer these prizes on your behalf." They pulled up the two wicker baskets from their boat and laid them on the prow. The nine dragon boats then struck up their gongs and drums to herald the contest, rowing back and forth in front of them. The other pleasure boats heard that the contest was being held over there and came swarming along until they completely surrounded them. The two men on the prow of Lu Shu's boat, seeing that a blue dragon had rowed close to them, seized a duck from one of the baskets and threw it into the river. On board the blue dragon one of the oarsmen, stripped to the waist, wearing nothing but a pair of close-fitting shorts, his queue bound up like a bunch of pickled vegetables, was squatting on his prow when he saw the duck thrown into the water and leapt in, seized it, and clambered back on board. That dragon boat then rowed away, and the green dragon boat that was behind it rowed up. The two men in the prow of Lu Shu's boat seized another duck and threw it into the river. Someone in the prow of the green dragon leapt into the river and seized the duck, after which that boat, too, rowed away. Then there came in succession the red-gold, black, pale rose, jade green, yellow, white, and multicolored dragons. As well as throwing ducks into the river, the men in the prow also threw them to people waiting to catch them, who then leapt into the river themselves. The nine dragon boats came and went, and when each of them had caught two ducks, the men throwing them took their baskets back to their own boat. The passengers on Lu Shu's boat said to them: "We'll see you at the Cold Garden on the Parade tomorrow morning." The two promised to be there, bowed, leapt back onto their

own boat, and went elsewhere to stage another contest. The dragon boats moved off to the Lotus Flower Bridge area, while the pleasure boats scattered in all directions.

Yuan You told the boatman to set off, and they followed the dragon boats to watch the activity. It was the Yangzhou custom at the Duanyang Festival for everyone to flock to the river. The banks were lined with sight-seers, men and women, some leading little boys by the hand, some carrying little girls on their shoulders. The women from the villages had calamus, mugwort, pomegranate, and buckwheat flowers hanging from their heads. Heavily waxed and powdered, they ran helter-skelter along the riverbank, wearing new blue cloth shoes decorated in a variety of colors with red embroidered heel straps, calling out to their relatives, pushing and pulling—and streaming with sweat from the strong sun. There were also a few drunkards, reeking of liquor, who careened into them. Petty tradesmen of all kinds did a brisk trade. It was the liveliest scene imaginable. A poet of that time wrote a regulated-verse poem entitled “On Watching the Dragon Boats at the Duanyang Festival”:

When we come to the Duanyang Festival,
The dragon boats' colors dazzle the eyes.
Their pennants block the light of the sun;
Their gongs and drums to the heavens rise.
The custom of mourning Qu Yuan is old;
Men compete to be first to seize the prize.
That boy over there is truly daring,
As above the water on his swing he flies.

Lu Shu and his guests followed the dragon boats and watched as beside Lotus Flower Bridge prizes were thrown from other pleasure craft. They also saw a man somersault into the river from the prow of a dragon boat, then break the surface a long way off, a feat that is known as a Water Leap and is even more exciting than catching ducks.

As the sun set, the dragon boats began to stream back. When the guests on Lu Shu's boat had had an evening drink and supper, they, too, ordered their boat to return. By the time they reached the Tianning Gate dock, the sedan chairs were already there waiting for the courtesans from the Qiang

Da house. They thanked Lu Shu and Fragrance and asked their lovers to escort them back, but Wu Zhen said, "You go on ahead. We'll join you before long, after we've seen Brother Lu back." Each of the courtesans then whispered something in her lover's ear before getting into her sedan chair and heading into town. Lu Shu took Fragrance's hand and invited the others to go ashore and return to the Jinyulou.

Once back in her room, Fragrance called to the maid to light the opium lamp. Wu Zhen smoked for a while, then said to Lu Shu, "Brother, give me the six dollars for hiring the boat and another six dollars for tipping the boatmen, so that I can pay them off before they come here and demand more money. In addition, weigh out twenty-four taels and let me and Brother Yuan go to the Cold Garden tomorrow morning to pay off the men on the dragon boats. There's no need for you to show up yourself; just wait for us at the Futura. If you do show up, I can't imagine how much money they'll ask for!"

"I'm ever so indebted to you two for taking this on," said Lu Shu appreciatively as he handed him the money. "I'll wait for you at the Futura tomorrow morning."

Wu Zhen tucked the money away. As he was about to take his leave, Cloud and Lute, having changed back into their everyday clothes, came in and thanked Lu Shu. "Brother-in-Law, you've been put to great expense today, but there's one thing we simply have to mention. The tenth of this month is Sister Fragrance's birthday."

"I'm so grateful to you for telling us," put in Jia Ming. "We had no idea. The four of us will send over a vaudeville troupe—octagonal drums, off-stage mimicry, ice dish, bat and ball, greater and lesser magic, fan plays—for a full day's entertainment."

"But how can I let you go to such expense for her birthday?" asked Lu Shu.

"Oh, don't be so conventional, Brother," said Jia Ming.

Lu Shu could hardly protest any further. He asked Mother Xiao to come upstairs. "Since it's Miss Fragrance's birthday on the tenth," he said, "please call the chef and tell him we'll have noodles for lunch, with four dishes of cold cuts as well as small bowls of red and white stew. For dinner, have him prepare a banquet for several tables. We'll also need to host the

members of the vaudeville troupe. The food should be sumptuous, and also of the finest quality."

Jia Ming and the other three brothers took their leave and went back to Qiang Da's house in the city. Their favorites had told them on the boat that they would send away any other clients, so on arrival each one went straight to a private room. There the opium smokers smoked, while the others drank tea, and they all laughed and chatted before getting ready for bed.

The nights are short on such joyous occasions. Early next morning Wu Zhen got up and called Yuan You. As soon as they had washed, the two men left Qiang Da's. First they visited the money shop, where they exchanged several taels and wrote a dozen notes discounted by ten or twenty percent, then went on to the Cold Garden teahouse. Inside they found more than ten tables occupied by fellows from the dragon boats. At sight of Wu Zhen and Yuan You, the men rose to their feet and waved. Wu Zhen and Yuan You saw that they were yamen runners and garrison soldiers, civil and military licentiates, and senior and junior guards at the city gates. Wu and Yuan exchanged greetings with them, then took seats in a separate room and had their tea. The men who had thrown the ducks into the water approached, sat down, and picked up the teapot to pour tea for them. Wu Zhen called for tea to be made, but the two said, "There's tea right here. No need to make any more."

Wu Zhen took out two notes and gave them to the men, saying, "Here, buy yourself something to eat and drink." As they tucked the notes away, Wu Zhen produced another ten notes and said, "Please give these to the nine dragon boats and the duck boat."

"That's not enough!" they said. "We can't do that."

Only when Yuan You added two more notes, advising them to "take this and be happy with it," would they accept the money. Wu Zhen paid for the two cups of tea, and he and Yuan You left the teahouse.

Two or three of the senior gate guards came out at the same time and said, "This plum has fallen into your hands, but it hasn't been shared with us guards. My brothers and I would like to benefit, too." Wu Zhen did not care to refuse and gave a note to each man, after which they returned to the teahouse.

Wu Zhen and Yuan You then went off and booked the vaudeville troupe for the tenth, after settling on a price. At the Futura they found Jia Ming, Lu Shu, and Wei Bi already there. As he joined them at their table, Wu Zhen said to Lu Shu, "It's a good thing you didn't go with us. They'd have had you pegged as a rich man, and heaven only knows what fantastic claims they'd have made on you. Brother Yuan and I had to reason with them again and again before we finally managed to clear things up." Lu Shu thanked them, and they all had breakfast. Once more Lu Shu persuaded them to meet for lunch at the Jinyulou.

The next day he returned to his uncle's to get more money and that afternoon went back to the Jinyulou. On going upstairs, he saw that Fragrance's door curtain was drawn and heard talk and laughter from inside her room. Assuming she had another client, he did not care to pull the curtain aside and just go in. However, the maid, on seeing him standing at the door, said, "There's no one in there, Master Lu. You can go in." He pulled aside the curtain and walked in, only to find Fragrance with rosy cheeks and a flushed face sitting on the side of the bed. At an angle in front of the bed was a chair occupied by a man in his twenties. He had a snow-white, perfectly smooth complexion and a glossy pitch-black queue tied with an expensive braid. He wore a bleached white pongee tunic, black silk trousers, a sash of pink nankeen embroidered with the twenty-four jade green figures, pure white cloth socks, black satin garters, and thin-soled shoes embroidered in black, and he was massaging Fragrance's feet. When Lu Shu came in, neither man noticed the other. The maid, who had followed Lu Shu in, called out, "Master Lu is here!" Fragrance winked at the young man and said, "That'll do!" The young man scrambled to his feet, picked up his razor case from the table, and scurried out. The maid restored the chair to its original position and served tea and tobacco.

"If you need to have your legs massaged at fifteen, what are you going to do when you're old?" said Lu Shu.

"I called him in to shave me, and I felt tired and asked for a massage. It's not something I do all the time!"

Lu Shu did not care to say more. He was still as infatuated as ever and for several days did not return to his uncle's house.

On the morning of the tenth, after finishing her toilette, Fragrance changed her clothes from head to toe, dressing in the new garments that

Lu Shu had given her for her birthday. Mother Xiao and the staff brought wine, candles, peaches, and noodles, and Lu Shu accepted them and handed out money in return. In Fragrance's room, a pair of large candles were lit, as well as a tall birthday candle. Fragrance went downstairs and lit a candle and did reverence before the kitchen god, then received birthday wishes from Mother Xiao and Cloud, and finally went upstairs to greet Lu Shu. As they frolicked about, Lute came in to offer her congratulations, and the entire staff did the same. After that, Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, Yuan You, and Wei Bi came in one after the other. Then the men arrived with the props for the vaudeville performance and took them upstairs. Phoenix, Cassia, Paria, and Lucky each came in her own sedan chair. Stepping out of their chairs at the gate, they went up to Fragrance's room and offered their congratulations, then set down the breakfast pastries that they had brought. After everyone had eaten, Fragrance said to them, "You've gone to such a lot of expense for my birthday!"

"It's nothing," they said.

As they chatted, eight or nine members of the vaudeville troupe,⁹ all wearing red-tasseled summer hats and formal gowns, came upstairs to offer their congratulations.

"Have you had anything to eat?" asked Wu Zhen.

"We had breakfast at the Baoshan teahouse on Lower Commerce Street," replied one, who asked for four hundred cash to cover the cost. Then he moved a square table into the center of the middle room upstairs and spread a red felt rug on top of it. Two members of the troupe brought in a small lacquered tea tray covered with a silk cloth and placed it on the rug. The first man then stood beside the table and offered birthday wishes before raising the silk cloth, beneath which was a teacup of fine china that was turned upside down. With two fingers the man twisted the bottom of the cup, then raised it and placed it on the tray. He passed the cup from one hand to the other, then raised it again—and inside there was a gold cap ornament. He then covered the ornament with the teacup, made some idle remarks, and raised it again—and the gold cap ornament had changed to one of jade. He covered that with the cup, and when he raised it again, the jade ornament had changed to one of crystal. Again he covered it with the teacup, and when he lifted it, the ornament had turned blue. Once more he covered it and then raised the cup, and this time the blue had changed

to crimson. "This is what's called 'climbing the ladder of success,'" he said, covering the crimson cap ornament with the teacup. He said a great many more things and then, when he next raised the teacup, the crimson cap ornament had turned into a gold seal. "This is what is called 'The six states bestow their honors, and the general takes the seal of command,'"¹⁰ he said. He covered up the teacup with the silk cloth and removed it. Then the man standing beside him came to the center of the room and performed the acts "The Immortal Takes the Beans" and "Duke Zhang Receives a Belt." When he had finished, he moved the table to one side.

Now two new performers came on carrying a red felt rug and stood in the middle of the room cracking jokes. One of them clapped his hands and patted his legs, chest, and rump before handing the rug to the other man, who took it and turned it over and over and then passed it back again. The first man threw it over his left shoulder and then spread it out on the floor, where it rose up in the middle. According to him, he breathed on it and uttered a magic charm. He then jerked the rug aside to reveal a large dish of longevity peaches, a large dish of steamed buns, and a big plate of Duanyang cakes, all of which he offered to Fragrance on behalf of the host. On her behalf, Lu Shu then rewarded the men with two taels. They picked up the red rug, handed it back and forth once more, spread it out, and underneath there was now a bowl of water with two live goldfish swimming in it. The audience burst into applause.

These men now withdrew, to be replaced by three others, who moved the table back to the center of the room. One of them, with a drumsong lute, sat in the middle. A second, with an octagonal drum, stood on the left, while on the right the third stood with his arms folded. The man who was sitting down spoke a few lines of prologue followed by some auspicious remarks, and then struck up a tune on the lute. The one on the left beat his drum, while the one sitting down sang a song in Beijing style, interlarded with jokes. The man on the right kept interrupting with irrelevant remarks and received a good many cuffs over the head from the one sitting down, which drew loud laughter from the audience. It was a performance known as chaffing. Although it was not commonly performed in Yangzhou, no party given by the aristocracy or high officials in Beijing could afford to be without it.

The three continued their speech and song for some time before withdrawing, to be replaced by a lone performer. With a paper fan in his hand, he first imitated all kinds of birdcalls, as well as the sounds made by pigs, ducks, cats, chickens, and dogs, and also by carts—little carts, big carts, ox-carts, mule carts, carts with light loads, carts with heavy loads, carts going uphill, carts going downhill.

After that he hung up a silk curtain and slipped behind it. The audience heard two cats in heat calling to each other and a woman in her seventies or eighties coughing and wheezing as she summoned her daughter-in-law. Then came a young woman's voice in a Taizhou accent muttering to herself, "My old man left and hasn't been home in days. I don't know if it's whoring or gambling that he's so keen on, but he's left me here on my own. In this gorgeous spring season he has left me alone in bed! How can I get to sleep? I feel limp and listless, but just listen to those two stupid cats yowling out there all the time. They're driving me out of my mind!"

OLD WOMAN, *in a croaking voice*: "Daughter-in-Law, come on, hurry up!"

YOUNG WOMAN, *speaking to herself*: "The old lady's in the back and needs reviving again."

YOUNG WOMAN: "Coming! Coming! Why did you call, ma'am?"
"I wanted to take a midday nap, but I couldn't get to sleep, my whole body's so full of aches and pains. I called you back here to give me a massage."

"Just sit where you are. I'll see to it." (*Sound of a back being gently pummeled.*)

OLD WOMAN: "Harder!"

"I am doing it harder." (*Sound of the pummeling now hard, now soft.*)

"Be a dear and sing me a song to cheer me up."

"If I start singing popular songs in broad daylight, the neighbors will hear and laugh at me."

"Then sing softly, dear. No one will hear you."

"I don't sing well. You mustn't laugh."

"What does it matter how you sing? It's all in fun. Who's going to laugh at you?"

YOUNG WOMAN, *singing a "Nanjing Air" as she pummels her mother-in-law:*

Everyone loves romance;
 Only the gods refrain.
 Love romance,
 And it's joy all day, unending joy.
 Love romance,
 And you'll gladly pay a fortune for a smile.
 Crave romance;
 It's sweeter than the sweetest honey.
 My only fear—
 He'll have a change of heart.¹¹
 My only fear—
 He'll have a change of heart.

OLD WOMAN: "My dear, you were pummeling me as you sang, just as if you were beating time. You really sing very well. When I was young I loved to sing popular songs, but I can't anymore. Now off you go and rest. I'm going to lie down in my room."

"Ma'am, why don't you take a nap in the room at the back? I'll go to the front room and lie down. Then later on I'll make you your afternoon tea."

"Off you go, then, dear."

YOUNG WOMAN, *muttering to herself*: "Once the old bag is off to sleep, I'll go to the front door and have a bit of fun." (*Sound of a door bolt being slid aside and a door creaking open.*)

YOUNG WOMAN, *speaking to herself*: "The street is so quiet it's eerie! Oh, look, there's a young priest coming from the western end of the street with an alms basket on his back, and he's *so* good-looking, much more so than my old man. When he comes to my door begging for food, I'll try to seduce him. I wonder if he'll play along."

YOUTH: "My lady, pray give us food. Amitabha Buddha!"

YOUNG WOMAN: "Young priest, why isn't your master here?"

YOUTH: "His hernia has flared up. He's in bed at the temple, and he's sent me in his place."

"Young priest, come inside with me."

(As the youth assents, sound of a door being shut and a bolt slid into place.)

YOUTH: "My lady, I'll be going as soon as I've received the food. There's no need to lock the door."

YOUNG WOMAN: "If you just close it, there are ever so many thieves about who'll get in. It's safer to lock it. Put down your alms basket. There's something I want to tell you."

"My lady, please give me the food and let me go back now. If I'm late, I'll be in trouble with the priest."

"It's still very early. Put your basket down on the table. Now, let me ask you this: how old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"Are you engaged?"

"Amitabha Buddha! We in the priesthood know nothing about engagement, or whatever it's called."

"Young priest, come into my room with me. I have some food I want to give you."

"Amitabha Buddha! Why would the food be kept in your bedroom instead of in the kitchen? Look, I'm not a *child*! My lady, why are you lying down on the bed? Where is that food you were going to give me?"

"Oh, dear! My stomach is terribly sore! Please do me a favor. Come and rub it for me."

"But I'm in the priesthood. How can I possibly rub your stomach?"

"Never mind about that! Hurry up!"

"I can't rub your stomach."

(Sound of the woman laying hold of the priest.) "Dear boy, come on, hurry up!"

YOUTH, *crying out*: "Ooh! Aah!"

OLD WOMAN, *calling out*: "Who's that crying out in the front room?"

YOUNG WOMAN: "It's nothing. I was just playing with the kitten."

YOUTH: "My lady, please let me go."

"You're here now. You can't go back."

"Oh! Oh! Stop pulling my trousers down!"

"I'm going to, no matter what you say."

(Sound of sudden knocking at the door.)

YOUTH: "My lady, we're in trouble! There's someone at the door."

YOUNG WOMAN: "Don't make a sound. Let me see who it is."

YOUNG WOMAN: "Who's that knocking at our door?"

MAN IN HIS THIRTIES, *speaking in a Shanxi accent*: "Ah'm back. Come on, open up!"

YOUNG WOMAN, *panic-stricken*: "Oh, dear! Young priest, it's my husband. Quick, hide under the bed and don't make a sound."

YOUTH: "This is my unlucky day. Oh, dear! I've hit my head!"

YOUNG WOMAN: "Hurry up and hide! And don't make a sound."

(Sound of repeated knocking.)

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT, *shouting*: "Why don't you open up for me? Ah'm going to kick the door down!"

YOUNG WOMAN: "Coming! Coming! The strangest thing happened. I was on the commode, and I couldn't get up."

(Sound of a door being opened.)

YOUNG WOMAN: "There you are!"

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT: "Ah'm back. Hurry up and lock the door!"

(Sound of a door being locked.)

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT: "Where did this alms basket come from? What's it doing on our table?"

YOUNG WOMAN: "It belongs to an old priest, who left it here. He said he had some business to see to and would be back soon to collect it."

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT: "Ah've been playing Ten Lakes¹² for two nights straight, and Ah needs to get some sleep."

"Why not go and lie down in mother-in-law's room at the back?"

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT: "Why should Ah sleep in the back room instead of in my own bed? Wife, that curtain is moving. What's that under the bed?"

"Go and lie down. I expect it's just the cat chasing a mouse."

"Ah don't believe you, Ah don't. Let me pull up the curtain and see what it is . . . Who are *you*? Come on, out!"

YOUTH: "Pray give us food. Amitabha Buddha!"

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT: "Now, isn't this just *wonderful*! You go out begging for alms and get yourself under people's beds! Ah'm going to beat you up, you bald-headed little ass!" *(Sound of blows and kicks.)*

YOUTH: "Benefactor, sir, you're doing me wrong!"

OLD WOMAN, *crying out*: "What's all that noise in the front room?"

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT: "You go back to sleep. There's someone here who's expecting . . ."

OLD WOMAN: "Who's expecting? Call the midwife at once!"

MAN WITH SHANXI ACCENT: "Don't be ridiculous! Ah've caught someone in your daughter-in-law's room."

OLD WOMAN: "Wang Shuren, what are you doing in my house? We're just celebrating a birthday and an engagement here. What would we want with an offstage mimic?"

At that point the screen was pulled aside, and the performer poked his head out and then emerged. His name was Wang Shuren, and his self-mockery drew gales of laughter from the audience. Just as he was removing the screen, the clock struck two.¹³

Lu Shu gave orders that cups, chopsticks, noodles, plates, soy sauce, vinegar, and small bowls be set out and invited everyone to drink wine and eat noodles. After the vaudeville troupe had finished, they asked for four hundred cash to go to the bathhouse and take a bath. When they returned, they played Ice Dish, Bat and Ball, and Soft and Hard Kung Fu, followed by various tricks of greater and lesser magic. Then everyone had afternoon tea, and the offstage man sang a "Teasing the Concubine" sequence. In the evening, they first provided dinner for the performers, then for everyone else. The guests played guess-fingers and drinking games, and the troupe did a number of lantern tricks. They also took a pair of tall glass lanterns with lighted wax candles in the middle and changed them into a large glass goldfish bowl with nine cups of water. The audience applauded repeatedly and rewarded them with notes. Then they sang several scenes from fan plays¹⁴ such as "Birthday Wishes for the Birthday Girl," "Zhang the Immortal Provides a Son," "A Dance for the God of Money," "A Dance for the God of Examinations," "The Prodigal,"¹⁵ and "Beating the Flower Drum." After they sang "The Priest Roasts Meat," the audience again rewarded them with cash and notes. When the fan plays were over, Lu Shu gave the performers eight silver dollars. They thanked him, gathered up their props, and left.

Lu Shu and Fragrance toasted all of the guests, who enjoyed themselves

thoroughly. They played Flowing Cups based on the *shou* character until the clock struck two, when they took their leave.

After the maid and the handyman had tidied up the room and spread a thin brocade coverlet over the bed, Lu Shu and Fragrance undressed and lay down. Naturally Lu Shu wanted to celebrate Fragrance's birthday with her and, equally naturally, she wanted to thank him for the birthday festivities. They were busy all night and did not fall asleep until dawn, but then slept on until the sun was high in the sky.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*Fragrance happens to fall ill;
Mo Ai throws his weight about.*

A month or more slipped by as the love-struck Lu Shu continued to spend all of his time at the Jinyulou. One morning, following breakfast at the Futura teahouse, he accompanied his sworn brothers to a restaurant for lunch, after which he went on to the Jinyulou, only to find Fragrance lying on her bed fully dressed but with her hair still not done. She did not even get up to greet him when she saw him come in. "You still haven't washed or done your hair?" he remarked in surprise.

"I feel a little dizzy, my eyes are all puffy, and I'm shivering with cold. I had some breakfast this morning, but I brought it up straight afterward. I still feel nauseous, as if I were going to vomit, and I have no strength in my limbs. I didn't eat any lunch. How could I wash and do my hair?"

Lu Shu put his hand on her forehead and then on her body. She did not feel very hot, but he at once sent for a doctor.

After a short wait, a doctor named Ren Wanlin arrived. He came up to Fragrance's room, and Lu Shu greeted him and invited him to take a seat. The maid offered the doctor tea, and he joined in some casual conversation. Then, with Fragrance's arm resting on a small pillow, he checked her pulse. "The cold and hot elements are blocking each other," he said. "She needs to fast for a day or two to expel the evil factors. If she continues on her present course, I'm afraid that complications will develop." Writing materials were brought out and placed on the table, and the doctor picked

up the brush and wrote out a prescription. Lu Shu paid for it as well as for the sedan chair fare, and the doctor took his leave. Lu Shu looked at the prescription:

DAY MONTH

First examination of patient. Cold and hot elements blocking each other. Nauseous, inclined to vomit. Quickly expel the evil factors, to prevent complications.

Bupleurum falcatum, 1.5 qian¹

Pericarpium citri reticulatae viride, 1.2 qian

Platycodon grandiflorum, 1.5 qian

Agastache rugosus, 2 qian

Schizonepeta tenuifolia, 1.5 qian

Fructus aurantii, 1.5 qian

Lentinus edodes, 1.5 qian

Radix sileris, 1.5 qian

Jiaozha, 3 qian

Yinzaoxintu, 5 qian

Green ginger, 2 pieces, in place of water

Lu Shu immediately sent someone off for the ingredients as well as a suitable sweetener. He watched as a servant fanned the portable stove and decocted the medicine with charcoal, then placed it on the table.

Fragrance, however, refused to take it. Despite all of Lu Shu's coaxing, she shook her head and would not drink. In desperation he picked up the bowl of medicine himself and tried it, then persuaded her to take a couple of sips. But at that point she shook her head again. "I really can't take any more. I'd only throw up." She hastily rinsed out her mouth with water. Lu Shu gave her some crystal sugar to take away the taste and helped her undress and lie down. Then, sitting on the edge of the bed, he rubbed her chest and smoothed out the bedclothes. Listless and out of sorts, she ate a little supper and then fell asleep.

Early the next morning Lu Shu got up and asked, "Are you feeling any better today?"

"A little better, but I'm still awfully dizzy."

As Lu Shu was having his wash, Mother Xiao came upstairs and said to him, "Master Lu, there's something you ought to know. Ever since the celebration, Miss Fragrance has not had her period. When I saw her vomiting yesterday, it crossed my mind that she might be pregnant. In my opinion, you should not be too free with the medicine."

"Let me call Dr. Ren back today and tell him what you've just told me. We'll see whether he thinks she's pregnant or not."

"Quite right," she said, going back downstairs.

Lu Shu lost no time in sending for Dr. Ren and telling him that Fragrance had missed her period. The doctor took her pulse with great care and said, "Today the hot and cold elements have moved slightly apart, but there is still a little blockage left. She should continue on a strict fast for one more day, and then, after she's had a bowel movement, there should be no further problem. As for pregnancy, it's been only a few weeks, and nothing has shown up in her pulse. But my knowledge is limited, and I wouldn't presume to conjecture. You should call in someone better qualified than I to consider that question." Before taking his leave, he canceled the *Schizonepeta tenuifolia* and the *Radix sileris* on the prescription and added one and a half *qian* of *Pinellia ternate* and three *qian* of radish seed.

Lu Shu asked Mother Xiao to come upstairs again. "I find this Dr. Ren rather indecisive," he said. "He can't tell whether she's pregnant or not. Is there a good doctor around here?"

"The most famous doctor in Yangzhou has a very peculiar name, one you won't find in the *Hundred Surnames*.² His surname is the Ming of *guangming*,³ and his personal name is Chiyuan. I don't know how many strange cases he has diagnosed correctly! Last year a general in Nanjing—I forget the man's name—had a daughter who was suffering from bloat. Goodness knows how many doctors had failed to cure her. Her father sent four of his senior deputies on a large boat to Yangzhou, just to invite Dr. Ming to Nanjing. When the doctor arrived, he checked the daughter's pulse through a curtain and was then invited into the reception room to prescribe a remedy. 'Your daughter isn't suffering from bloat,' Dr. Ming told the general. 'She's pregnant. It's a boy, and she's in her eighth month.' He wrote out a prescription to protect the fetus. The general received the news without any visible emotion and merely asked his aides and relatives to accompany the doctor at dinner in the study. He himself took a double-

edged sword and went into his daughter's room, where, without asking her whether it was true or not, he slit open her belly with the sword and found a perfectly formed male fetus inside. He then went to the study and said to Dr. Ming, 'Doctor, I salute you. You're a great expert.' When he told Dr. Ming what he had done, the doctor almost died of fright. 'There's no need to be afraid,' said the general. He ordered a servant to bring out five hundred taels as a reward and told the deputies to escort Dr. Ming by boat back to Yangzhou. After that the doctor's fame spread far and wide, and he was besieged by patients. Whenever he was asked to examine anybody, the cost of his medicines and fares would be several times what other doctors charged. As the saying goes, 'Better a wise man than a doctor.' Think it over, sir."

"So long as he's skilled at reading a pulse, I don't mind how much he charges. Send someone to ask him to come. We'll see what he has to say." She went downstairs and sent for the doctor.

It was dark before Dr. Ming arrived in a sedan chair. He came upstairs, and Lu Shu invited him into Fragrance's room. While the maid offered him tea, Lu Shu told him that Fragrance had missed her period and had been vomiting and still felt dizzy. He also showed the doctor the prescription Dr. Ren had written. Dr. Ming checked Fragrance's pulse and said to Lu Shu, "Your young lady's external evil factors of cold and heat have dissipated; Dr. Ren's medicine was quite appropriate. As for the pregnancy, after one month the embryo is the size of a dewdrop, after two months it's like a peach blossom, and only after three months does it separate into male or female. One needs to wait three months before it can be detected in a reading of the pulse. In your young lady's case, she's in her fortieth or fiftieth day, so it does not appear in her pulse. She should use her own judgment about the temperature and see that she eats regularly. I don't imagine she'll be engaging in any strenuous activity, but it's important that she exercise caution in whatever she does." On the bottom of Dr. Ren's prescription he wrote: "I make so bold as to suggest adding one capsule of weeping forsythia, one and a half *qian*." He then took his leave. The medicine and the chair fare cost Lu Shu a good deal of money.

Lu Shu now suspected that Fragrance was indeed pregnant, and he at once sent for the ingredients and had them decocted. Then, just as he was coaxing Fragrance to swallow the medicine, someone arrived in Lute's

room opposite and began causing a commotion. His name was Mo Ai, style Xuyou. His father, who had made a fortune of several thousand taels from his activities as a shyster, had just this one son and a daughter. Mo Ai was fifteen when his father died, and with no occupation of his own, he spent all of his time in the brothels and ran through the whole of his inheritance. Fortunately for him, however, while he still had money he had joined a group of rich men's sons, and because he was always quick with a jest, they found him an indispensable companion on visits to the pleasure quarter and treated him as a kind of hanger-on. He had seen Fragrance in the Jinyulou before her deflowering, found her quite beautiful, and been strongly attracted. Since she was still a virgin and he had no money at the time, he could only dream about her. Later, in desperate financial straits, he arranged to sell his own sister to Suzhou. After settling on a price, he took her there and got a couple of hundred taels for her. While in Suzhou his old passion for whoring flared up again and he spent a good deal of the money that he had received. With no more than a few dozen taels left, he returned to Yangzhou, paid off a few debts, and redeemed some of his clothing from the pawnbroker. When he heard that Fragrance had been deflowered and was receiving clients, he was delighted and came rushing over excitedly with a couple of taels to spend the night with her.

He was shown into Lute's room, where she and Cloud greeted him and the maid offered tea and tobacco. "What about your Miss Fragrance?" he asked.

"She's in bed with an illness," said Cloud.

Mo Ai stood up. "I'll step across and take a look at her," he said.

Cloud barred his way. "She has a client with her!"

"Now, there's a real hot courtesan for you!" he said angrily. "I come along, and she pretends to be sick and won't even come out and say hello. If she's so ill, why does she have a client with her? I insist on spending the night. Get her in here at once!"

"There's no need to be angry, Master Mo," said Cloud, "Miss Fragrance really is ill. The client she has with her is a steady patron, and because she's ill, the nights he spends with her are very quiet. Please come back some other time."

This suggestion infuriated Mo Ai even more. Pounding the table, he roared, "What sort of three-eyed Marshal Wang,⁴ what low-life scoundrel,

gets to spend the night with her? You think I have no money, do you?" He took out a purse and flung it on the table. "What's this, if it isn't money? I insist on staying here tonight. If this fellow won't give way, let him come out and take me on instead of hiding away in that room!"

From across the hall in Fragrance's room Lu Shu heard all of this and flew into a rage. He didn't know who the speaker was, but he knew well enough that every word was aimed at him and he couldn't stand it. He wanted nothing more than to rush out and thrash the man. However, Fragrance had only just taken her medicine, and when she saw how angry he was, she clutched weakly at his arm and refused to let him leave the room. "If you go out and fight him, I'll kill myself!" she cried. Because she was ill, and also because he feared to disturb the fetus, Lu Shu did not like to pull himself away from her grasp. Instead he cursed the man from inside the room.

The Jinyulou steward was surnamed Hua, and because he was a convivial character and a born jester, he was known as Drummer Hua. When he heard the quarreling, he raced upstairs. He went first to Fragrance's room, where he said to Lu Shu, "Please don't be angry, sir. Quarrels are hard to prevent in the pleasure quarter. That man has no idea that it's you in here. If he did know, he wouldn't dare to cut loose like this. I expect he's drunk. Let me go over there and have a word with him and send him on his way. If you get angry, won't it give Miss Fragrance an attack of nerves?"

At these words, Lu Shu's anger began to subside. "Hurry up and see who it is," he said.

As Drummer entered Lute's room, he saw her holding the man down beside the bed. He approached and saw that it was Mo Ai. "Is that Master Mo?" he asked. "It's such a long time since you visited our humble establishment. What brings you here today?"

Mo Ai saw that it was Drummer. "How hot she must be, this courtesan of yours! I come here with money to spend the night, and she doesn't even bother to show her face, she looks down on me so much. What big player is she hiding behind? I *want* to see her!"

"Just what are you saying, Master Mo? Did you ever visit us when she didn't come out and make a fuss of you? But today she really is sick. She's just taken her medicine and gone off to sleep. In her room with her is a steady patron, someone who's here to attend on her. But even if she weren't

sick, since she already has an engagement for the night, she still couldn't entertain you. Put yourself in this man's place. If you had arranged to stay the night and then someone else came along and wanted to do the same thing, could you give way to him? First come, first served—that's the rule in everything. You must have been visiting some house where you had a drink too many. Look, do me a favor, will you? Come back some other day, and I'll guarantee to play the matchmaker for you. When you've enjoyed yourself with Miss Fragrance, you'll thank me in a big way!"

Mo Ai gave a thin smile, and when Drummer picked up the tobacco pouch to replenish his tobacco, he got to his feet. "We'll take this up some other time," he said.

Drummer picked up Mo Ai's purse from the table and handed it to him. "Put your purse away, sir. I'll see you downstairs." He shouted to the servant below to light a torch. Mo Ai took the purse and went down. Drummer held the torch and saw him as far as the main gate, where he handed the torch to Mo Ai. "Careful how you go, sir. I'll say good-bye now. Come back and enjoy yourself some other day." Mo Ai took the torch and went off muttering to himself.

Drummer returned to Fragrance's room, where Lu Shu asked him, "Has that bastard left yet? What's his name? What sort of person is he?"

"Master Lu, 'A great man does not stoop to petty things.' Don't ask, just ignore him."

But Lu Shu persisted, and Drummer said, "He's Mo Ai, also known as Mo Xuyou. He doesn't have a job but goes about with a group of gentlemen as a sort of hanger-on, popularly known as a lickspittle. An impossible person like that, why not just ignore him, let it go?"

"I know," said Lu Shu. "Why don't you go and get some rest?" Drummer went downstairs.

In attending on Fragrance, Lu Shu slept in the same bed, but he still seethed with anger. It's true what they say, he thought. Life is always harder away from home. When I visited the pleasure quarter at home, I was the one who was the center of attention, and I always had my way with the courtesans; I never had to fight with anyone for a woman's favor. I haven't felt so low as this in my entire life. Tomorrow morning I'll make a point of talking to my sworn brothers about how to find this Mo fellow and work off my anger on him. Thoughts such as this tormented him most of the

night. At dawn he rose, washed, ate some lotus seeds, and told a servant to call the doctor to come and check Fragrance's pulse. Then he left the Jinyulou and went to the Futura teahouse to meet his brothers and consult them about his feud with Mo Ai.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*A vendor seeks a reward for a floral basket,
And a madam receives her share of a thanksgiving service.*

When Lu Shu reached the Futura teahouse, he found the brothers already there. He greeted them and joined them at their table, then poured himself a cup of tea. "Brothers," he said, as he sipped his tea, "you've got to help me avenge myself. Last night someone insulted me." When the others asked what had happened, he told them how Mo Ai, who had wanted to spend the night with Fragrance at the Jinyulou, had cursed him before Drummer Hua had eventually persuaded the man to leave. "I've been seething over it all night. I'm not familiar with your city, and I'd like to call on you for help."

Three of the brothers, Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, and Wei Bi responded. "How terrible! Brother Lu has been insulted in our city, and that's something we cannot allow. He shouldn't have to take the responsibility himself. We'll get a few fellows together and find this man Mo and give him a good hiding as we drag him off to the yamen. At the risk of losing a few taels, we simply have to teach this man a lesson. Once he finds out what's good for him, he won't dare offend anyone again."

Before they had finished speaking, Yuan You got up, walked over to face Lu Shu, and bowed deeply. Lu Shu sprang to his feet. "What was that for?"

"Brother, there's something I have to tell you. Mo Ai is a cousin of mine. He doesn't know you and bears no grudge against you. I don't believe it

was a deliberate offense on his part, more likely just a drunken rant. Now, don't be angry. Please excuse him, as a favor to me. I'm going to find the little swine and bring him to the Jinyulou to make a proper apology."

"Do sit down, Brother," said Lu Shu hastily. "Since he's a relative of yours, there's nothing more to be said."

"Even though he's Brother Yuan's relative," put in the other three, "it was still wrong of him to insult Brother Lu. The rules of behavior have to be followed. Otherwise, we can't accept the arrangement."

"When we've had our tea, you go on to the Jinyulou," said Yuan You. "I'm going to find him and see that he follows the rules." With Lu Shu trying to forestall an apology and the other three insisting on one, Yuan You set off.

After some casual conversation, the others left the Futura with Lu Shu and went up to Fragrance's room in the Jinyulou. They found her lying fully clothed on her bed, her illness still not completely better. When she saw them come in, she rose to her feet, greeted them, and invited them to sit down. "Has the doctor been?" Lu Shu asked her.

"He was here just now, checking my pulse. He told me to take a little clear soup followed by a dose or two of medicine and I'd be fine." Lu Shu asked for the prescription and studied it, then called for a servant to make up the medicine. He also told the maid to light the opium lamp for Wu Zhen.

Shortly before noon Yuan You came in with Mo Ai. As soon as they entered Fragrance's room, Yuan You explained to Lu Shu: "Last night, Cousin Mo had been drinking, and he didn't realize who you were and said some very offensive things. He's come here specially to apologize."

Lu Shu and the others sprang to their feet and greeted them. When he saw Mo Ai bowing to him, Lu Shu hastily bowed in return. "You're cousins, after all," he said. "It was quite unnecessary of Brother Yuan to do this. I'm very sorry. Do sit down." Cloud and Lute greeted Mo Ai, who bowed to the others present and then joined them. They introduced themselves and exchanged pleasantries.

Mo Ai called the steward and ordered wine for everyone, but Lu Shu objected. "I can't let you play the host in my favorite's room. Let me do the honors today. I'll impose on you some other time." They sparred politely with each other, before Lu Shu emerged as the host. After drinks

and lunch, Mo Ai thanked Lu Shu and took his leave. Wu Zhen satisfied his opium habit before going off with Jia Ming, Yuan You, and Wei Bi. Lu Shu continued to attend on Fragrance in her illness and did not return to his uncle's house.

The next morning, when Lu Shu arose, he found that Fragrance had made a complete recovery. The maid came in and did her hair while he stood beside the dressing table filling her pipe with tobacco. As they bantered with each other, Tiger Cub Wang, who peddled his gambling basket along the Parade, arrived at the Jinyulou with a large floral basket woven of jasmine flowers surrounded by numbers of artificial butterflies. He had heard of Lu Shu's liaison with Fragrance and was hoping for a reward. As he presented the basket in Fragrance's room, he said, "So this is where you are, Master Lu! I've specially brought this along so that you and Miss Fragrance can enjoy the scent." Fragrance picked up the basket, which was exquisitely made, employing almost two thousand jasmine flowers, and told the maid to hang it inside her bed curtain.

Lu Shu took two silver dollars from the white suit he was wearing and gave them to Wang. "Thank you for all the trouble you've taken. Here, buy yourself a couple of drinks."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Wang as he went off with the money.

Now that Fragrance was cured of her illness, Lu Shu tried to build up her strength with all kinds of choice food and drink.

One day he invited the sworn brothers to join him for lunch in Fragrance's room. Afterward the opium smokers were smoking and the others idly chatting, when Mother Xiao came upstairs, greeted them all, and took a seat. "Gentlemen, there's something I need to bring to your attention. It's a tradition in this house to hold a thanksgiving celebration for someone who has recovered from an illness. The other day, when Miss Fragrance was poorly, I kowtowed I don't know how many times before the kitchen god, praying for her recovery and promising to hold a thanksgiving immediately afterward. Don't anyone tell me that the gods don't exist, because they do. The bodhisattva showed her powers, and the very next day Miss Fragrance was cured of her illness. I've already fixed on a date for the thanksgiving. On the eleventh of the sixth month the altar will be set up, and on the twelfth we'll hold a day-and-night celebration. Both

will demonstrate our gratitude to the bodhisattva. Since it's a house affair, I can hardly ask Master Lu to fund it on his own. Master Lu, if you would be so generous as to pay my share for me, I will undertake to provide the animal sacrifices, the incense and candles, the whole lavish outlay. On the twelfth, I would like to invite all of you to attend with your favorites, to see it and also to enjoy yourselves. I wonder if you would do me the favor?"

At the mention of a thanksgiving celebration for Fragrance, Lu Shu, who did not realize that such an affair in Yangzhou was quite inexpensive, said, "I'll leave it to you. Let me contribute ten taels."

"In that case, you will outdo us all, sir."

The four brothers said, "We will certainly come and offer our congratulations. The courtesans from Qiang Da's will come, too. There's no need to send anyone to invite them; we'll give them the message."

"The rules of etiquette still apply, even when you know the person well," said Mother Xiao. "Of course we'll send someone to invite them." After repeating her requests, she went back downstairs.

The brothers wanted to invite Lu Shu to Qiang Da's for drinks and dinner, but Fragrance would not let him go. After having some fun at the couple's expense, the brothers said good-bye and left.

Time slipped by, and soon it was the eleventh of the sixth month. In the early afternoon, four or five exorcists (in Yangzhou they are commonly known as incense men) arrived at the Jinyulou with a load of essential items as well as spirit tablets and portraits. In the middle room downstairs they hung up portraits of the Original Saintly Emperor of the Eastern Sacred Mountain, Equal to Heaven; the Great Emperor Who Forestalls Calamities and Brings Blessings, Prince of Heaven; and the Empress of Mount Tai, as well as the portraits and tablets of the various spirits. They also hung up proclamations on long banners. They asked Mother Xiao for a quantity of rice as well as paper money to tie to their queues with red string, as well as a small set of scales and a mirror. They erected a little table, placed a censer and incense and candleholders on it, arranged the area around the altar, and began beating their drums and gongs and sprinkling water there to summon the spirits. Then, having set up the altar, they ate some supper and went off. At dawn the next morning eight or nine of them came back; beating their drums and gongs, they began the ceremony and summoned the spirits. They also took a long pole bound with bamboo

branches and erected a large paper banner. Having chanted for some time, they breakfasted on pastries and noodles.

At the sound of the gongs and drums, Lu Shu and Fragrance rose early. She at once called someone to do her hair and help her dress. Then, shortly before noon, the brothers arrived together, each contributing a silver dollar as his share. Mother Xiao accepted the money and thanked them, then invited them up to Fragrance's room. Lu Shu and Fragrance greeted them and asked them to sit down, and they smoked and chatted together. There were also other visitors to the house, each of whom had contributed his share; they were shown into Cloud's or Lute's rooms. During the morning Phoenix, Paria, Cassia, and Lucky sent presents; Mother Xiao dispatched someone to invite them, and they arrived at noon in their chairs. Cloud and Lute welcomed them and asked them in, noting that they were gorgeously dressed in silks and brocades. After they had offered their congratulations, they were invited upstairs to join the brothers. Pastries were set out, and then everyone was invited downstairs to watch the celebration.

The exorcists wore priests' robes, and their heads were bound with black silk to which paper hats had been fastened. They chanted something incomprehensible that they said was an invocation to a higher power. One of them attached red woolen yarn with several bronze coins to his queue. His arms were bare, and he had on a blue cloth skirt. He brandished a kitchen knife and declared that he was opening the Gate of Prosperity. With a knife he drew some blood from his arms, caught it in a teacup, and spilled it over the doorframes as he capered wildly through the rooms. He also placed a red bamboo chopstick on each doorsill, then cut it in two with the knife. The courtesans were frightened by the sight of such violence and clung to their patrons, trying to hide. When the exorcist had finished his dance, he let off some fireworks.

Fragrance invited everyone upstairs for lunch. Afterward the exorcists moved a square table into the middle of the courtyard. They placed an altar on the table with a plate of pig's intestines on top of that. Then, beating their bronze drums, they began to circle the table, humming and chanting as they went, a ritual known as Circling the Flower Disk.

Another exorcist, striking a large gong, sat in front of the god's image and sang a tale called "Zhang Xiang Bought a Bride's Trousseau but Was Murdered by Widow Bai."¹ The courtesans thought it was a true happening

and exclaimed in sympathy. When this exorcist had finished, another one put on a blue cotton robe and a goddess's hood and talked a lot of gibberish as he performed the Goddess Dance,² reducing the courtesans to helpless laughter.

In the evening a banquet was set out, to which Cloud invited everyone, and they thoroughly enjoyed themselves. When the party broke up, the four brothers tipped the exorcists and also the staff on behalf of their favorite courtesans. Cloud, Lute, and Fragrance tried to persuade the brothers and their favorites to stay for the night performance, but they declined and took their leave. The clients in the other rooms ate their supper and also left after tipping the exorcists. Lu Shu, in Fragrance's room, was the only one who stayed.

In the evening the exorcists danced a "Fifty-three Visits."³ They dressed up as spirits or ghosts and turned somersaults, performed Boiling the Candleholder,⁴ did magic tricks, and played all kinds of games. They also dressed up as Buddhist priests roasting meat, made fun of everybody, and asked for money. Lu Shu and Fragrance gave them two more notes, and Cloud and Lute gave them cash. The *Ninety-nine Bamboo Branch Songs of the Yangzhou Pleasure Quarter* has a song that runs as follows:

With countless tricks they cozen people's money;
To thank the gods—that's the reason they tender.
They Open the Gate and dance the Goddess Dance—
It lets them gaze upon the female gender.

All night long the music continued, and it was dawn before the service concluded. Once more Lu Shu paid on behalf of Fragrance, and the exorcists went off, their carrying poles slung over their shoulders. Lu Shu continued to be enthralled by sex and beauty and carried on his revels morning, noon, and night, completely forgetting his purpose in coming to Yangzhou. Nor did he try to calculate how much of the money that he brought with him had already been spent.

When Fragrance went to see the dragon boats, she had heard the other guests saying what an exciting scene the lake was on the eighteenth of the sixth month, and she broached the matter with Lu Shu. "When I was ill the other day I took a vow to worship at Guanyin's temple. These last two

nights I'd no sooner gone to sleep than I saw the bodhisattva standing in front of me in my dream. The nineteenth is her birthday. I'd like to talk to you about hiring a boat on the eighteenth so that I can go there with you and fulfill my vow."

"I've heard that on the eighteenth the lake is really exciting, but if just the two of us go, it won't be much fun. Why don't I hire a big boat and invite my brothers and their favorites to join us? You'll be able to fulfill your vow, and we'll all have an exciting time and also see something of Yangzhou scenery."

"Why, that would be wonderful!" she exclaimed. Lu Shu at once sent Felix off to invite the brothers to come and advise him on hiring a boat.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

*A priest seeks donations in the Hundred Sons Room,
And mapi compete in magic in the Great Hall.*

Because of Fragrance's desire to visit Mount Guanyin and fulfill her vow, Lu Shu sent Felix to ask the brothers to come and advise him on hiring a boat. "Brother Lu," said Wu Zhen, "since you're looking for excitement, you'll need to hire a big boat for us and our ladies, and also a lantern boat, for which you should engage half of a ten-piece band to play and sing for us. Yes, indeed, the lake will be jammed with boats on the eighteenth, and we'll need to do something special if we're to have any fun."

Lu Shu was delighted with the idea. "That really appeals to me. Let me ask you to make the arrangements."

"It would be best if we went together to book the boat," Wu Zhen said to Yuan You. They went to the Tianning Gate dock and reserved a boat, then returned to Fragrance's room and reported to Lu Shu, who paid them the deposit. He ordered wine and asked all four brothers to stay for lunch.

As they were about to leave, Wu Zhen said to Lu Shu, "Brother Yuan and I have ordered the boy band. We'll see you on the morning of the eighteenth." Lu Shu again urged them to invite their favorites on the excursion, and they promised to do so.

On the seventeenth Lu Shu completed the rest of the arrangements, sending someone off to buy candles and tall joss sticks, preparing donation packets, and ordering the cook to provide a meal on the boat the following day. On the eighteenth they rose early, and when Fragrance had fin-

ished her toilette, she put on a new pale blue Hangzhou silk gown, a white jacket, and crimson silk trousers. As she was eating breakfast with Lu Shu, the other brothers came in together. Lu Shu and Fragrance greeted them and invited them to sit down and have breakfast, but they said they had already eaten.

"Will the ladies be here soon?" Lu Shu asked Jia Ming.

"You know, your enthusiasm for this trip has given us a lot of grief!"

"How so?"

"He's only joking," said Wu Zhen. "It's just that because they're going out on the lake, they've been putting in requests for new clothes. At this very moment they're busy having their hair done. I expect they'll be along soon."

"It might be better if we waited for them on the boat," suggested Lu Shu.

"Oh, there's nothing more boring than sitting on a boat waiting for someone," said Jia Ming. "Why don't we send our pages down? Then, when the women arrive, the pages can come back and report to us. Wouldn't that be better?"

"Perfect," said Lu Shu. "You go ahead," he told Felix. "As soon as the courtesans arrive in their sedan chairs, come back and tell us." Felix went off with the other pages.

Lu Shu told a servant to light the opium lamp. From spending his time with Phoenix, Jia Ming had also acquired an opium habit, and he and Wu Zhen lay down opposite each other and smoked.

After a while, Felix came dashing upstairs and stood in the doorway of Fragrance's room. "Sir, all four ladies have arrived at the dock," he reported to Lu Shu. "I asked them to go on board and find seats for themselves. The boys of the band have also arrived." Lu Shu nodded. Wu Zhen and the others gathered up the smoking paraphernalia, packed it into a bag, and told Felix to take it to the boat.

Lu Shu asked them all to go downstairs, and Fragrance invited Cloud and Lute to accompany them. At the dock they were descending the stone ramp when Phoenix, Cassia, Paria, and Lucky saw them from the boat and came out to welcome them. The new arrivals boarded the boat, and the five boys of the band came forward to pay their respects.

Lu Shu noticed a rowboat moored alongside the big boat. The covering had been taken off and a bamboo frame, painted red, had been

attached in its place. On top of the frame was a green silk awning from which hung numerous baskets of glass flowers as well as all kinds of small lanterns—glass lotus flowers, fruit, insects, birds. . . . Even the railing was decked with multicolored glass lanterns. There were over a hundred of them in all.

The boatman came aboard and asked if all the guests had arrived. "They're all here," said Lu Shu. "You can start." The band climbed into the rowboat, then both boats cast off and either rowed or poled their way along. With the rowboat in front, its band playing and singing, and the big boat close behind, they made their way past Lower Commerce Street. People sipping their tea in the teahouses heard the music and turned their gaze toward the river. A few of the older, more experienced ones said, "From the way those wastrels are throwing their money about, this jaunt must be costing them dozens of taels." But some of the more irresponsible younger ones disagreed. "In this day and age, that's what you have to do if you want to be in fashion." If only they could have done the same thing, they'd have been thrilled; unfortunately they lacked the means. On the other hand, they couldn't bear to miss out on the day's excitement, so they hurriedly gathered a dozen or so friends from the various teahouses and hired a small fishing smack with a covering and a pair of oars. They crammed into its cabin, packed as tightly together as the passengers on the little ferryboats that ply between the city and Guazhou and Shaobo. They bought fresh lotus flower lanterns, strung a long cord through them, and tied it to the boat's rail, and, by skimping on food and other supplies, managed to enjoy themselves all day and half the night. When the cost was reckoned up the next day, each was asked to contribute a few hundred cash. Some of them couldn't come up with their share of the money, and numerous quarrels broke out, until eventually, under pressure from the boatman, they pawned a few small items, and the problem was solved. There is no need to go into any further detail about them.

Meanwhile both boats had emerged from Rainbow Bridge. It was still early, and not many pleasure boats were out on the water. Lu Shu told the boatman to take them first to the Mount Guanyin dock. When he had tied up and lowered the gangway, the passengers went ashore. With Fra-grance's servant carrying candles, paper ingots, and joss sticks, they took her first to the Earth Spirit Shrine to offer incense and give presents to the priests and then to the Grove of Merit and Virtue. On the left wall of the

entrance hung a wooden board with a notice attached to it. They stopped to look at it:

—, by imperial appointment magistrate of Ganquan county in Yangzhou prefecture of the province of Jiangsu, recipient of ten additional grades and ten honorable mentions, in the course of respectfully fulfilling his official duties, has conducted an investigation and now issues the following strict prohibitions:

The Grove of Merit and Virtue, a place visited by the emperor,¹ is one of the most renowned temples of the Huainan region. Every year on the nineteenth of the sixth month, the birthday of the Mahāsattva of the Ship of Mercy,² men and women from near and far flock there in great numbers to burn incense and pray for good fortune. Among them are lawless hooligans who push and shove and create an uproar, looking for a pretext to cause a disturbance. There are also pickpockets and cutpurses who seize any chance to steal money and other items. In addition, there are small groups of supernumerary personnel from the various departments of the yamen who snatch items that are for sale and, if the toys on the stalls are not entirely to their satisfaction, resort to wanton violence. There are also beggars who make aggressive demands. These types of offenders are to be vigorously arrested and prosecuted, and the order is on record. Now, as we approach that date once more, I genuinely fear that the same people will resort to their old tricks. In addition to directing constables to investigate and arrest offenders, I am placing this prohibition on record. I am issuing it to inform the abbots of the temples, the wardens and constables, and the leaders of Daoist monasteries, and so on. If there are any of the aforementioned lawless hooligans who revert to their old ways and deliberately flout the law, I expect them to be arrested and delivered to the yamen so that, after due investigation, they may be placed on public display in a cangue. If wardens and others try to cover up these acts, they will be severely dealt with alongside the offenders. This prohibition is effective immediately; there will be no period of grace. Everyone must respect and comply with the law. By Order—

At the bottom there was a seal and the date in vermilion ink. On the wall to the right of the entrance were notices posted by the deputy commander

of the Yangzhou garrison, the head of the southwest militia, and the Ganquan police chief.

But the visitors were in no mood to read the notices, and they entered the temple. On the embankments on each side of the entrance they saw numbers of beggars, male and female, leading or carrying children, as well as the dumb, the blind, the scrofulous, the paralytic, people with running sores on their heads, people with smashed noses . . . the old and the feeble, the crippled and the lame, all of them clamoring for money. A number of other people held brightly shining lanterns as they visited the temple to offer incense. They led male and female worshippers, whose queues were tied with crimson cord and who wore blue nankeen trousers. They carried small red stools and knelt down to pray after every few steps.³ The crowd was densely packed as they arrived at the Great Hall, which was brilliantly lit up, with incense lingering on the air. Men and women were worshipping in great numbers, and the bells tolled incessantly. An acolyte had already received the candles and joss sticks that they had brought, and he inserted the sticks and lit the candles. Phoenix, Cassia, Paria, Lucky, Cloud, and Lute bought candles from a priest, while on each side of them bells and drums sounded. Fragrance and the other courtesans worshipped before the image of Guanyin, Mahāsattva of the Ship of Mercy. The boys of the band requested candles and themselves kowtowed.

The priest invited them into the Hundred Sons Room⁴ in the Rear Hall to burn incense and worship. In the shrine of Guanyin, Giver of Children, they found numerous plaster images of children, some with red or yellow cloth hats, others bareheaded. Some were on horseback, or carrying umbrellas, or playing with dragon lanterns, while others were on swings, or turning somersaults, or striking bells or drums. In all there were over a hundred of them. Jia Ming turned to the courtesans: "If any of you want to have a son, you just need to steal one of those hats and you're bound to conceive." Phoenix, Cassia, Paria, Lucky, Cloud, and Lute giggled at this advice but each of them went up to the shrine and snatched a hat. Only Fragrance stood where she was, without any sign of emotion.

"Isn't Sister Fragrance going to steal a hat?" asked Cassia. "Oh, I see. When is our brother-in-law going to serve us a dish of eggs?"⁵ Lu Shu and Fragrance laughed but said nothing. As they bantered with the others, a

number of women came up to burn incense before the image of Guanyin, Giver of Children. Among them was a young woman of less than twenty, sporting a new coiffure and brand-new clothes, who, after kowtowing to the image of Guanyin, remained in front of the shrine, hoping to sneak off with one of the hats but seemingly afraid that she might be seen. She did steal one, in great trepidation, and then went off with the other women, tittering among themselves, to burn incense in another hall.

"Look at that woman with the new coiffure," said Jia Ming. "No doubt she's a bride, not long married. I was amused to see how nervous she was when she stole that hat, and I've made up a poem about her."

"Do tell us," they chorused.

He chanted this four-line poem:

A newlywed, nervous and shy—
To pray at Guanyin's shrine she came.
She put out her hand, snatched a hat,
But kept looking back, cheeks aflame.

"Marvelous!" they cried.

The priest invited the party into the reception room, where they sat down and an acolyte served them tea. There were hampers of food on the two tables, and the priest offered his guests refreshments, at the same time winking at the acolyte, who promptly brought out an album. The priest then formally greeted everyone, saying, "The rear building of this temple has been rebuilt thanks to the donations of various ladies and gentlemen, but it still needs painting and refinishing and the statues need gilding. I sincerely hope that you gentlemen and young ladies will each make a donation, and that you will be blessed with innumerable descendants and live long and happy lives." He then laid the album on one of the tables, while the acolyte brought along brush and ink. The sworn brothers saw that the album had a *nanmu* cover with a white slip of paper pasted on it, bearing the words "Great Blessings, High Office, Worthy Deeds, Good Fortune" in cherry red letters. On opening the album, they found that it was merely a routine appeal for contributions, with numerous attachments in red pasted in at the back, saying that Master This or Mistress That was happy to contribute such-and-such an amount. There were also many red

attachments with no writing at all. "We don't need to write anything, either," said Jia Ming. "We should just offer cash."

Lu Shu took from his purse a three-thousand cash note and a packet of incense money that he had prepared for the occasion and handed them to the priest. "Let this note be a contribution from the whole party," he said. "Please accept it and use it to help complete the work."

The priest took the note and checked both the amount and the money shop it was drawn on. "I would also like to see each of the young ladies gain some blessings from good deeds," he said.

Lu Shu handed him another note for two thousand. The priest took it and said, "Please inscribe your names in the album. When all the work is done, we'll pray for each of you."

"It's a mere trifle, not worth recording," said Lu Shu. "In the words of the popular saying, 'The money goes into the temple, while the merit reverts to the donor.'" The priest called the acolyte to set out plates and prepare vegetarian noodles, but Lu Shu said, "We have lunch waiting for us on the boat. We'll come back and impose on you some other time." He stood up, and the party left the reception hall with him. The priest saw them as far as the Great Hall, which they found more crowded than ever. Two Guanyin processions had arrived from somewhere, each bearing a festooned sedan that now rested in the hall. There were two men there who were stripped to the waist and had nothing on their feet. They wore blue nankeen trousers tied with a pink nankeen sash and had two-foot-long iron spikes stuck in their arms. With an iron flail in their hands, they were skipping wildly about beside a heap of burning-hot incense in the courtyard of the hall. One of them laid his jointed iron flail in the heap of burning incense until it was red-hot, then with his right hand took a sheet of paper money and wiped the red-hot flail with it from one end to the other. All that remained of the paper money was a wisp of blue smoke, but the skin of the man's hand had suffered no injury whatsoever. The other man leapt barefoot into the heap of burning incense and then out again, with no harm to his feet. Some kind of black magic was evidently involved.

When they saw the two men whooping and yelling as they leapt about, the courtesans began to tremble with fright. "Why are those two skipping around like that?" Paria asked Yuan You.

"They're known as *mapi*,⁶ but they call themselves masters. It's universally forbidden to stick those spikes into the body that your parents gave you. Those people justify themselves by claiming it's because their parents are ill, or they themselves are ill, and they've taken a vow to do it, but they're totally ignorant of the Sage's words: 'We receive our bodies, our hair, our skin, from our parents, and we dare not do them any harm.'⁷ People like that are the least filial creatures in the whole world."

"Do they hurt, those spikes that they stick in their bodies?" asked Paria.

"People say that they use a magic charm and the spikes don't hurt, but I've never had any experience myself. As to whether it hurts or not, you should know the answer to that."

Paria was about to pinch his mouth, but she felt too embarrassed with all the people present. "You can joke as much as you like," she said, "but I'll have something to say to you when we get back." Just then the two performers came skipping up in front of the sedans in the Great Hall. They waited until the people in the processions had kowtowed before leading the way into the courtyard, skipping as they went. The other people picked up the two sedans and followed the men out of the temple.

The sworn brothers protected the courtesans, some going ahead of them and others behind, as they left the temple and went out of the inner gate. Both sides of the roadway were lined with stalls selling all kinds of playthings. The seven women and five men in the party differed over the merits of the toys, some claiming this one was the most fun, others maintaining that that was the best. If only they could have bought them all! The vendors, seeing how interested their customers were, purposely raised their prices. The members of the party chose different toys, each taking a large number, the total cost of which came to seven and a half silver dollars. Lu Shu paid it and received several hundred cash in change. Then, with everyone clutching his or her toys, they arrived again at the embankments.

The beggars, female as well as male, noticed them returning from worship and called out, "Sir!" "Ma'am!" "Master!" "Miss!" and asked for cash. Lu Shu told Felix to distribute the change among them, but charity proved hard to practice. Felix had no sooner taken out the cash than the beggars swarmed around him. Those who got some money wanted more, creating such an uproar that he couldn't complete his task. Sweating profusely, he

became so unnerved that he tried to break out of the beggars' circle and in doing so pushed someone over. Despite that, there were still many men, women, and children who trailed him all the way to the dock. He leapt on board the boat, but the beggars tugged at its prow and would not allow it to cast off until they had received a great deal more. The boat then passed under Lotus Flower Bridge and tied up just opposite Cloudy Mountain Pavilion, where they found numbers of men playing Ten Pots.⁸

The passengers had lunch on the boat, and some of them smoked opium. When the courtesans had washed their hands and faces, everyone went ashore and wandered about enjoying the scenery. As they admired the view from the pavilion, they heard the sound of gongs in the distance; a Guanyin procession was making its way to Lotus Flower Bridge. The *mapi* ahead of the sedan were burning magic charms and plunging spikes into themselves. This time the courtesans were able to observe the scene from above, and they were not only unafraid, they also enjoyed a better view. They watched as the *mapi*, with numerous spikes in their flesh, came skipping over the bridge, closely followed by several processions. They heard people saying that they came from Pottery Post, Pond Street, Muddy Ditch, Huang Family Village, One Mile Bridge, and Three Reed Cottage.

After watching the processions, they had the musical instruments brought out—three-string, flute, panpipe, drum, clappers, lute, fiddle—and placed on the table in the pavilion. The band performed two sequences from opera. Phoenix felt inspired and asked them to accompany her while she sang the sequence “At first, under the imperial Tang.”⁹ Her voice was forceful and resonant, much like a man's. When she had finished, Fragrance sang the sequence “Just for you, my flowerlike fair.”¹⁰ Her voice was soft and gentle, exquisitely beguiling, and it brought the sightseers together to gaze wistfully at her. A Ten Pots player picked up a two of bamboos, and when it didn't match anything in his hand, discarded the one of characters and the nine of circles and called for a showing, completely misplaying his cards.

After Phoenix and Fragrance had sung their songs, everyone applauded, and then Cassia, Paria, Lucky, Cloud, and Lute each sang a popular song. The boatman brought along plates of refreshments. Wei Bi and Lu Shu gambled and won many sprigs of jasmine flowers and tuberose, as well as Water Mice, which they sent ahead to the boat.

By now it was afternoon, and the pleasure boats, large and small, were out in swarms. There were many lantern boats, but also some rowboats with their covers removed that sped back and forth propelled by three oars. From the boats came opera as well as popular song; it was truly a case of "music and song filling the ear, gorgeous women in droves." The small fishing smack with the fresh lotus flower lanterns rowed behind them with its two oars. In the cabin the passengers, who were so tightly jammed together that their bodies ran with sweat, gave an out-of-tune rendering of Xipi and Erhuang songs. A contemporary poet wrote a seven-word regulated poem entitled "A Night Outing on the Lake at Yangzhou on the Eighteenth of the Sixth":

Male and female they mingle together—
 It's partly for worship, partly delight.
 With clouds up above, the hills vivid green,
 The moon on the water, ripples of light.
 Lanterns shining skyward, the beat of oars;
 There's wine and song in the taverns all night.
 They gather on purpose to honor Guanyin;
 This Yangzhou is truly a festive sight!

The brothers paid for the tea and tobacco in the pavilion, and everyone boarded the boat again. By the time they had returned to Little Gold Hill and Peach Blossom Temple and enjoyed the sights there, the sun had set and all the pleasure boats had lit up. The lake was filled with lamplight, which reflected on the water like a thousand strips of flaming silk or a myriad sunset rays. Mooring the boat at a lively spot, they set the table for dinner and played guess-fingers. The boys of the band had their supper in the lantern boat and played and sang in the cabin, then circled their boat and hailed the other boats, which also began playing music and competing with them in song. When the lantern boat had hailed a dozen or more boats, it pulled alongside their boat, and the boys who played the male and female leads in the opera came aboard and toasted the passengers, played guess-fingers with them, and also sang two popular songs. Lu Shu rewarded them with four silver dollars, and they withdrew to the lantern boat, which their boatman continued to row back and forth.

It was the fourth watch before the pleasure boats began to go back under Rainbow Bridge.

By this time the sworn brothers were worn out with partying, and they told the boatman to head slowly back to the Tianning Gate dock. When they arrived, the chairs of the Qiang Da courtesans were already there waiting for them. The courtesans clung to their lovers and asked to be taken home. The lovers nodded, and everyone collected his or her belongings and handed the toys, jasmine, and tuberoses to a servant to carry. Then they took leave of Lu Shu and Fragrance and got into their chairs and went as far as the Tianning Gate. Outside the guardhouse they saw two foreign-style lanterns belonging to the northern headquarters of the Yangzhou garrison. An officer and a few soldiers from the garrison were there to keep order. On this day the gate was open, and they went through it to Qiang Da's.

Lu Shu and Fragrance collected their belongings and went ashore with Cloud and Lute. An endless stream of people was passing by. At Tianning Gate there was a kiosk offering free tea. It had a matting roof from which four split-bamboo lanterns hung bearing the words "Make Friends with Tea." A number of country people, both men and women, were heading to the temple to worship. Others were standing in front of the kiosk drinking tea, while still others, tired out from all their walking, were sitting on the ground eating watermelons, cantaloupes, and dry rations. But Lu Shu was in no mood to look at any of them. Holding hands with Fragrance, he accompanied the courtesans back to the Jinyulou. He was as love struck as ever.

If you are wondering what happened, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In a fit of jealousy Fragrance rages at Sturgeon;

In a fight over a courtesan Wei Bi beats Turtle.

Lu Shu returned to the Jinyulou with the three courtesans and, as love struck as ever, continued to spend his days and nights in revelry. On his first visit to the brothel, he had been attracted by the seductive looks of Maid Zhang, the woman with the unbound feet, and had wanted to start an affair with her. He had often engaged her in suggestive banter, but later, after taking Fragrance's virginity, he had been prevented from acting on his desire by fear of the latter's jealousy. Maid Zhang, for her part, was impressed by his youth and good looks as well as his free-spending ways, but when he joked with her, she was too afraid of Fragrance to flirt openly and merely made eyes at him. Secretly, however, she put in countless requests for money and clothing, requests that he always complied with. The pair could be described as intimate friends who could go no further than friendship for fear of being observed.

One day Lu Shu was joking with Fragrance in her room when a new client arrived in Cloud's room downstairs and began shouting for Fragrance to come down. "I don't know who the bastard is, yelling like that," said Fragrance. "Wait a moment while I go down and have a word with him and send him on his way. I'll be back soon." Having soothed Lu Shu's feelings, she went down to receive the newcomer.

Soon afterward Maid Zhang entered with a white copper canister and proceeded to replenish the tobacco in Lu Shu's water pipe. He was sitting

on Fragrance's bed when she came in and put the pipe to his mouth. There was no one else in the room at the time, and on a sudden impulse he pulled her down beside him. "You know how I feel about you," he said. "With her downstairs, this is a heaven-sent opportunity for a little kiss. If there's anything you want from me, it's yours." As he tried to plant a kiss on her lips, she jumped up to evade it, but he held her firmly, and the pipe fell to the floor.

"All you're after is what you call fun," she said, "but what if she comes in and sees us? How could I ever hold my head up again?"

"She's only just gone down. It'll be some time before she comes up again. Come on, do me a favor." He leaned over her and tugged at her trousers.

Fragrance, however, had tiptoed upstairs and was standing just outside the door. When she heard this exchange, anger welled up inside her, she flung aside the door curtain, charged into the room, rushed up to the bed, and, seizing Lu Shu by the ear, screamed at him, "What a low, vulgar creature you are! If you'd wanted to make out with her, I would never have stood in your way. But you couldn't do your dirty business anywhere else, could you? Oh no, you had to come in here and muck up my bedclothes!" She shouted for Maid Wang: "Strip off that coverlet and take it away and wash it! I can't sleep in dirty bedclothes that have been fouled by other people!"

When Maid Zhang saw Fragrance come rushing into the room, she pushed Lu Shu aside and wriggled free, then ran downstairs. Maid Wang came in and picked up the pipe from in front of the bed and put it on the table. Taking a firm grip on Lu Shu, Fragrance began ramming her head furiously into him, raging and sobbing without a moment's pause. Cloud came in to calm her down, but Fragrance took no notice. Mother Xiao, who had heard the quarreling and rushed upstairs, managed to persuade her to move to Lute's room opposite, where she continued her sobbing and screaming. Among other unreasonable charges, she cursed Maid Zhang as a slut who had stolen her client.

From downstairs Maid Zhang heard the endless tirade, and her feeling of shame turned to one of rage. She screamed upstairs, "I was just refilling the pipe when Master Lu said a few playful things and pulled me down on the bed, but you keep insisting that we were up to something. Anyway, you needn't pretend to be so perfect yourself. You were closeted behind the

door with that hairdresser. We all knew what was going on; we just didn't want to give you away. For us servants, our good name means everything. You've just ruined mine, and I'll never be able to find a place anywhere else. Not only that, but my husband's a wild animal where these things are concerned, and if he hears any gossip about me in Yangzhou, that'll be the end of me. Now that you've shredded my reputation, I just don't want to go on living anymore. You may be a red-hot courtesan, but even you will have to answer for it with your life!" She banged her head and beat her chest while hunting about for a knife or a pair of scissors.

Her threat so alarmed Mother Xiao and the staff that they tried everything to talk her out of killing herself, but her quarrel with Fragrance only grew more vicious. When Mother Xiao pulled Fragrance into Lute's room, Lu Shu had tried to sneak downstairs, but Fragrance heard him and came rushing out of the room, grabbed hold of him, and sobbed, "Just where do you think *you're* going? You were planning to enjoy yourself and have it off with her, but now that she's kicking up such a fuss, you want to clear out and leave me to face the abuse. Well, if I'm going to die, we'll die together." She pulled him back into the room and continued to revile him.

The steward, Drummer Hua, saw that neither Fragrance nor Maid Zhang would listen to reason and concluded that no one in the house was capable of resolving the dispute. Rushing over to Qiang Da's, he found the brothers all there, and as soon as he told them what had happened, they set off for the Jinyulou. In Fragrance's room, Lu Shu sprang up to greet them and invited them to sit down. They noticed that Fragrance's chignon was undone and her hair askew, that her eyes were swollen with crying and her cheeks stained with tears. She was lying facedown on the bed, sobbing brokenheartedly. Downstairs they could hear Maid Zhang still carrying on. Feigning ignorance of the circumstances, Jia Ming asked Fragrance, "Sister-in-Law, why aren't you paying any attention to us? I suppose you're sick of our coming here all the time?"

She twisted over to face them. "Master Jia, I can't bear to hear you say that sort of thing. We had a spat, he and I, and when you gentlemen came in I was slow to greet you. I hope you'll forgive me for it."

"No one's blaming you for anything. We couldn't blame you, anyway, out of regard for Brother Lu. But what were you squabbling about? Tell us, and we'll decide who's in the right."

Neither Fragrance nor Lu Shu would say anything, but the brothers persisted, and in the end Cloud said, "Brother-in-Law and Sister aren't willing to say it, so let me be the one to tell you. Just now Fragrance left the room, and Master Lu and Maid Zhang were joking about when Fragrance came in again and caught them at it. She started badmouthing the maid, who got upset and wants to kill herself. The quarrel is going on right now. You've come at exactly the right time. Sort out the rights and wrongs for them, and spare us all these pointless recriminations."

"Miss Fragrance, use a little soy sauce, by all means, but there's no need for any vinegar,"¹ said Jia Ming with a smile. "After all, what cat doesn't like meat? Please leave it at that, for all our sakes."

As they were talking, Mother Xiao came upstairs and quietly asked the brothers to go down to Cloud's room. "Gentlemen," she said, "your friend Master Lu started this off on a sudden impulse. What Miss Fragrance said to her was too much for Maid Zhang, and now she wants to kill herself. I don't have a very big brain in this poor old head of mine, and I wish you gentlemen would take over the task of mediating."

The brothers called Maid Zhang into the room and pleaded with her in a friendly fashion, but she refused to back down. When they repeated their arguments, she said, "Gentlemen, she's ruined my reputation in this job, and I can't stay here. Tell her to find me a good place. Since she accused me of having an affair with Master Lu, which is an unspeakable lie, get her to pay me something to compensate me for the scandal. Otherwise, I'll just bide my time, whether this is settled in a court of law or privately."

"We must always listen to advice," Jia Ming urged her. "Newness may be a good thing in clothes, but not in our friends. Let's clear this matter up for you and work out a compromise that will allow you to stay on here." But Maid Zhang was adamant.

"Mistress Zhang, you're determined to leave," said Wu Zhen, "and it just so happens that Mistress You, who's been at Qiang Da's house for three or four years without taking a leave to return home, has somehow gotten herself pregnant and wants to quit her job and go back to have the baby. Now if we recommend you to Qiang Da, I can guarantee that he'll accept you on the spot. In addition, we'll get Master Lu to give you a few taels without letting Miss Fragrance know. As a favor to us, don't breathe a

word about it." After conferring with his brothers, he promised her ten taels, and she finally agreed.

The brothers went back upstairs to Fragrance's room, where they ordered wine and tried to mediate between Lu Shu and Fragrance. "I can't let you play the host here," said Lu Shu. After some polite sparring, he again ended up as host.

Once the wine had been brought, Lute put herself out to seduce Wei Bi. She sang several sweetly flattering songs to the music of the lute, and he was attracted and bandied jokes with her. By this time he was also rather drunk. After the party broke up, Lute wanted him to stay the night, but since he had come with the others, he was afraid that when they returned to Qiang Da's they might tell Lucky, so he felt he had to go back to town. "Since you've favored me with your love, let's have a tacit agreement," he said to Lute. "Some other day I'll come back on my own." On that understanding, she allowed him to go back to the city with the others.

Meanwhile, despite all the pleas of the sworn brothers, Fragrance's fury continued unabated. She climbed onto the bed, pulled Lu Shu's hair, and bit him. She raged at him, cursed him, dug her nails into him, and cried and sobbed, all the while making every kind of malicious and unreasonable accusation. Lu Shu responded by paying her every conceivable compliment, swearing countless oaths, and taking innumerable vows. After spending a great deal of time and effort on the bed, he finally managed to bring her around. And there I shall leave them.

The four brothers arrived at Qiang Da's and went to Cassia's room, where Phoenix, Paria, and Lucky joined them, having heard them arrive. "Have you had any supper?" they asked. Jia Ming told them in detail why they had been held up at the Jinyulou and explained that Lu Shu had insisted they have supper there. The courtesans couldn't stop laughing at the story. Wu Zhen called Qiang Da in and recommended Maid Zhang for a position, and he agreed.

Sanzi then came in and asked, "Are you gentlemen going back to-night?"

Wei Bi, who was lying on Cassia's bed, was the first to reply. "I'm drunk. I'm not going back."

"Since you're not going back, we'll stay and keep you company," said the others. Sanzi left the room.

"Stay where you are for a while," Lucky said to Wei Bi in private. "I have a steady client in my room, one who hasn't been by in a long time. Let me send him off first, then I'll come and invite you to my room."

"See you get rid of him as soon as you can. I'm dead tired."

"I know." She excused herself to the others and left the room.

The client in Lucky's room was one Mi Shengmo, a young man in his twenties with a large head and a face full of pockmarks who was also short and stout. For these reasons, and also because his speech was rather slow and he was an eldest brother, people called him Big Face Mi and gave him the nickname Turtle. His father had worked in the Salt Administration and acquired a great deal of property, and when he died, he left many contracts behind. Mi Shengmo had no job or profession of any kind; he relied on rents and loan repayments for a living. In the past he had had a relationship with Lucky that had brought her in a good deal of money, clothing, and jewelry, but because he had been out of town collecting debts, he had not been to see her for a considerable time. He had now been sitting in her room for quite a while. Lucky had intended to have him stay the night, but she had also been afraid that Wei Bi might come and want to stay over himself, so she had never actually asked Mi. For his part he fully intended to catch up with her after a long absence and had taken it for granted that she would invite him to stay. But here he was, sitting for a long while, and she hadn't said a word about his staying over. Moreover, she had spent much of her time in another room, leaving him on his own, and he had begun to feel a trifle uneasy. And now she came in and sat herself down but still said nothing. He grew impatient and called Sanzi into the room and announced, "Sanzi, I'm staying over."

"It's a most unfortunate thing, Master Mi," said Sanzi, "but Miss Lucky already has an engagement for tonight."

Mi Shengmo became even more angry. "If she had an engagement, why didn't she mention it? She's kept me waiting all this time. How can I go back now?"

"Master Mi, you're quite wrong there. When you arrived, you said nothing about staying the night. How could Miss Lucky suddenly announce that she had an engagement? As for your sitting here all this time, that was by your own choice. We couldn't very well urge you to leave, now, could we?"

"Look, I don't care whose engagement it is. You'll just have to put him off. I'm staying."

"I can't possibly tell him anything so unreasonable. First come, first served; that's the rule. You haven't favored us with your presence in quite some time. Don't start any trouble now."

"If I didn't favor your house, I wouldn't want to stay the night, would I? Now that I want to stay, you give me all this palaver, just to stop me. You can't possibly be worried that I won't pay, can you? Take a look at your accounts; I'm not a penny in arrears for the nights I've stayed here. You're deliberately trying to get me out of the way. Well, I'm not going. If you have some monster in the house who's game to stay the night, I'll take him for a very brave person. If he won't yield, tell him to come in here and have it out with me. If he can get the better of me, I'll let him stay." Sanzi continued to give meek and submissive replies, but Mi Shengmo only became more and more angry and began ranting and raving.

Wei Bi was lying down on Cassia's bed because he was a little drunk. Since Wu Zhen needed to satisfy his habit, he had gone off with Jia Ming to smoke in Phoenix's room, and Cassia had gone with him, while Yuan You had been pulled into her room by Paria for a tête-à-tête. As a result, Wei Bi was alone in Cassia's room. At this late hour, when all was quiet in the house, he could hear someone shouting in Lucky's room, and everything that the man said was directed at him. He flew into a drunken rage, tore off his gown, and rushed over to Lucky's room, where he found someone sitting down and carrying on in a mixture of accents. Launching a surprise attack, Wei Bi rushed up, seized him by the collar, and threw him down. Mi Shengmo, caught unawares, found himself flung to the floor. Wei Bi then seized the chance to straddle him and start pummeling, while Mi kept up a stream of curses. Sanzi hastily pinned Wei Bi's arms to his sides and knelt down and began pleading with him.

When Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, and Yuan You got word of what was going on and rushed into Lucky's room, they asked Wei Bi what the matter was. "Brothers, don't ask," said Wei Bi. "Just help me beat up this ignorant bastard."

Jia Ming looked at Mi Shengmo but did not recognize him. "Brother, don't be angry," he said. "Let him up. With us here, he won't be able to fly away. Everybody has to listen to reason. Let him get up and say what he has

to say. If it's unreasonable, we'll help you deal with him." Wu Zhen prized open Wei Bi's grip and pulled him to his feet. Mi Shengmo was helped to his feet by Sanzi.

"Wonderful!" he fumed, "*Just wonderful!*"

Jia Ming sat him down and asked his name. "Mi Shengmo," he said.

"Why did you quarrel with our friend?" asked Jia Ming. Mi hesitated and said nothing.

"Master Mi wanted to spend the night with Miss Lucky," explained Sanzi. "I told him that someone else had already engaged her, and he started cursing wildly here in her room. Master Wei overheard and came in and somehow or other knocked him down."

"Brother Mi," said the sworn brothers, "it's not that we're taking Brother Wei's side, but you do seem to be in the wrong here. First come, first served; that's the rule. Suppose you had engaged her, and our brother Wei had come along later and wanted to do the same, you wouldn't have let him. We're in the pleasure quarter, after all, where we're not supposed to quarrel. If you hadn't called him names, Brother Wei would never have been so rash as to start fighting you. As the proverb says, nothing good comes from quarreling or fighting. Brother Wei *is* rather young and hot-headed, but do give way to him, for our sakes." Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, and Yuan You then bowed to Mi Shengmo, and he bowed in return.

Mi Shengmo had intended to fight Wei Bi, but when he saw how many supporters of his adversary were present, he knew that he was outnumbered and had to contain himself. Leaving the house, he returned home, where all night long he continued to stew over the incident. The next day he was thinking of gathering some men to go to Qiang Da's, seize Wei Bi and Lucky, and bring charges against them. But when he learned that Wei Bi was the son of the candidate for the Salt Administration, he realized that he couldn't match Wei's power and merely brooded. The pent-up anger brought on a serious illness, which almost cost him his life, and he took a vow never to go near the pleasure quarter again. It was fortunate for him that he suffered those blows from Wei Bi, because thanks to them his property was preserved. From this point on he drops out of the story.

After persuading Mi Shengmo to leave, Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, and Yuan You returned to their favorites' rooms to sleep. The following day they asked Lu Shu to give Maid Zhang the ten taels and have her belongings

moved to Qiang Da's, where she was to work. A few days after that, it was Jia Ming's birthday, and Wu Zhen, Yuan You, and Wei Bi decided to hold a party at Qiang Da's to which they would all contribute. Since they had not seen Lu Shu for a couple of days, Yuan You wrote him a letter of invitation.

If you are wondering if he attended the party, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Brother Jia offers sound advice to a friend;

Mistress Lu extracts the truth from a page.

As love struck as ever, Lu Shu continued to spend all of his time at the Jinyulou. He was in bed one morning when he heard Maid Wang calling from outside the curtain: "Sir, wake up! Master Yuan has sent his steward over with a letter for you, and he's waiting for an answer." Startled awake, Lu Shu quickly put on his underwear and got out of bed. He saw that the red recipient's slip on the envelope read, "For the perusal of Master Lu Wenhua." Beside it, in small characters, were the words "Reply urgently requested," and on the back of the envelope was the date, "Sent on the first day of autumn of the Xinsi year."¹ He tore open the envelope and took out the two sheets of six-column paper, which read as follows:

The cherry apple flaunts its beauty, the leaves of the *wutong* tree begin to wither. I think of you and hope that you are happy and successful and that you are enjoying your conjugal bliss. I recall the time when you first arrived in Yangzhou and swore brotherhood with us. Every morning and evening, almost without exception, we spent together. Who would have expected that you would meet your predestined love, enter paradise surrounded by fairy maidens, and enjoy both music and romance but have no time for your old friends? Now, since it is Brother Jia Xinpan's birthday, Yingshi, Qingyuan,² and I intend to borrow Qiang Da's house to hold a celebration that will last all day. I make so bold as to hope that

you will join us at the Futura teahouse. My only fear is that the fairy maiden may not let young Liu³ leave the Peach Blossom Grotto, but I beg to inform you of the event anyway. I send this letter especially to apprise you and hope that you will peruse it. I also await your arrival in the morning. I shall stop here.

Respectfully, your sworn brother, Yuan You

When he had finished reading the letter, Lu Shu asked, "Did Shunzi bring this?"

"Yes."

"Go down and tell him to give my regards to his master and the others and say that I'll join them shortly."

After Maid Wang had done so, she brought the water for Lu Shu's wash, then called to Fragrance: "Miss, do get up! Master Lu has been up for some time."

"I'm awfully tired today. I just want to go on sleeping."

"Don't call her," said Lu Shu. "I'm off to the Parade. Let her sleep." He finished his wash, ate some lotus seeds, and left. On North Willow Lane he ran into Felix, who accompanied him to the Futura, where Lu Shu found the sworn brothers already assembled. He went straight up to Jia Ming and bowed, saying, "Brother, please forgive me for not coming to offer you birthday congratulations."

Jia Ming returned the bow. "It's just an ordinary birthday.⁴ I wouldn't dream of bothering you. Do sit down." After greeting the others, Lu Shu took a seat.

When the tea had been poured, Wu Zhen said, "Brother Lu, I don't mean to criticize, but for several days now you've been so preoccupied with your beautiful lover that you haven't come to join us. Today is Brother Jia's birthday, and if Brother Yuan hadn't written to you, you'd have forgotten even that. What do you think? Do you deserve a penalty?"

"I've been in a daze, I really have! Make me the host today by way of a penalty."

"We've already agreed to share the cost of the celebration," said Wu Zhen. "There's no need for you to host it on your own."

"Then tomorrow I'll invite you all to lunch and supper at the Jinyulou,

as an offering to Brother Jia and also to make amends for my misdeeds. I hope you'll all forgive me!" Laughing, they called to the waiter to cook the noodles. After breakfast, they went on to Qiang Da's, had lunch and supper there, and did not part until the second watch.

When Lu Shu returned to the Jinyulou, he found Fragrance sitting in her room. "Where have you been gallivanting about? Coming back at this hour!"

"Today was Brother Jia's birthday, and we shared the cost of a celebration in Miss Phoenix's room," replied Lu Shu.

"All you think of is your own pleasure, while I get left at home."

"The brothers were going to send someone for you, but this morning you said you were tired, and I was afraid it might be too much for you, so I made the excuse that you weren't very well. That's why no one came to fetch you. It never occurred to me that you'd criticize me for it!"

Fragrance gave a sour smile. "It doesn't matter what the occasion was. For no reason at all you've wished an illness on me! There's no need for all the fancy double-talk. If you'd taken me with you, you couldn't have had such a high old time with that sweetie of yours." Greatly agitated, Lu Shu swore one oath after another, but Fragrance continued to complain in the same sarcastic manner.

All of a sudden a visitor arrived in the room opposite, and Maid Wang quietly called Fragrance away, leaving Lu Shu alone in the room. Bored and dejected, he threw himself down on the bed. He heard talk and laughter from the room opposite and after a while the sound of the door closing and the curtain being drawn. Later he heard the sound of the washbasin, and still later Fragrance's voice quietly seeing the visitor out and urging him to come early the next day. Finally, he heard the visitor's footsteps as he descended the stairs.

When Fragrance returned to her room, Lu Shu noticed that her hair was tousled. "Why is your hair in such a mess?" he asked.

"Sister Lute and I were playing about and she grabbed hold of me and mussed up my hair."

"I was in here and I never heard Lute's voice. It sounded like a man's voice to me. Look, I know what's going on. There's no need to pretend."

"All of a sudden you've turned into an entirely different person, full of the wildest suspicions! If you're here tomorrow, I'm not even going to leave my room, just to avoid your suspicions." Her face darkened.

"Don't get upset," said Lu Shu. "Let me tell you something. I've come across a poem in your *Bamboo Songs of the Yangzhou Pleasure Quarter* that puts it nicely:

A clever girl handles two men at once;
When she's done with one, it's the other's lot.
The old one's out the door; the new one stays;
She allows him to clean her cooking pot.

But you're even cleverer than that—you reverse the order:

The new one's out the door; the old one stays,
And you allow him to clean your cooking pot."

Fragrance burst into sobs. "We in this business may be the lowest of the low, but we are not all stupid. I may have spent several years in a brothel, but I was still a virgin when I met you. Ever since you took that away from me, I have not slept with any other client. Fool that I was, I hoped that you'd rescue me from the fiery pit and that I'd spend the rest of my life with you. But after we've been together just a few months, your promises have turned out to be nothing but sweet talk. And today you start slander-ing me for no reason at all, making me out to be some vile, disgusting creature. When, oh when, will I get free of this life? When will I ever escape?" She threw herself down on the bed and started sobbing again. Lu Shu had to console her in every possible way before he finally persuaded her to stop. He remained as love struck as ever.

He had been in Yangzhou since the fourth month. He had brought with him over a thousand taels and three or four hundred silver dollars. How could that amount support such lavish expenditure as his? He had already run through the whole of the money and now owed a large amount in brothel fees.

Mother Xiao broached the matter with Fragrance. "For days now young Lu has been very down in the mouth. Several times I've asked him for money, and each time he's put me off with a vague reply, which is very different from the generous response he used to give. In those days I only needed to mention something and the money would be there. It occurs to

me that he's from out of town and isn't involved in any business here in Yangzhou. By my calculations, he's spent a good deal in this place. If he runs out of money and we go on asking him to stay, where will we end up?"

"Godmother, you've just reminded me of something that I meant to tell you. Half a month ago I noticed that he was no longer wearing his gold rings. I asked him what had happened to them, and he said that when he visited the bathhouse he took them off to soap himself and left them on a bench by the cold pool, then forgot to put them on again. Later, when he went back and searched for them, they were gone. I suspected that he'd given them to that vile creature, and we quarreled about it all night. But the other day he went out, and when he returned the gold bracelet on his arm as well as that pair of gold toothpicks on his gown were also gone. I asked him about them, and he said a relative of his had borrowed them to pawn. It occurred to me that since his uncle is in charge of accounts at the Salt Administration, he must be comfortably off, and it's unlikely he would borrow anything to pawn. I felt sure that he had pawned the things himself. And the last day or two I haven't noticed that emerald thumb ring of his, either."

"I have an idea," said Mother Xiao. "Try him out with a really big request, and then we'll decide what to do."

Fragrance agreed, and when Lu Shu returned she fawned over him more than ever. "The other day Sister Lute had an out-of-town client who gave her a gold headband, and now she makes a point of showing it off in front of me. I'd like to ask you for one. It should be at least one ounce six *qian*; I don't want one of those skimpy things. Get it for me within a day or two so that I can torment her with it."

Lu Shu had never refused a request from Fragrance. Now that she had asked for a gold headband that would cost twenty to thirty taels, what was he to do, considering that he had spent all his money? He couldn't refuse her, so he had to put her off with a vague answer, but after two or three days she began to press her demands. "I've sent someone home for money," he replied, "and as soon as I have it, I'll get you your headband." She gave a cynical smile and from that moment on began to treat him much more coldly than before. When Mother Xiao heard from Fragrance that the request had not been honored, she concluded that Lu Shu had spent all of his money and became more insistent in her own demands. His answer was

always that the money hadn't come in yet, for which he offered a variety of excuses.

One morning, when Lu Shu arrived at the Futura, Jia Ming was the only one there. The two men greeted each other and then sat down and drank some tea. After exchanging a few pleasantries, Jia Ming said, "There's something I'd like to say to you, Brother, but you mustn't take offense."

"Please tell me what's on your mind. There's no way I could take offense."

"When you first arrived in Yangzhou, you said you had come here on orders from your father to find a concubine. Because Fragrance was so charming and beautiful, you wanted to buy her as your concubine. My brothers and I should not have let you go fishing with too little bait, but you threw your money around and forgot the main purpose of your visit. By my calculations, you've spent hundreds of taels over the last few months. In those places, money is all that counts. When I was over there the other day I noticed that Fragrance was not as loving to you as she used to be. You're away from home, Brother, and if you've spent all your money, it won't be just this whore who's giving you the cold shoulder; when you get home, you'll find it hard to face your father, too. You ought to give this some thought: If Fragrance can be gotten, then get her. But if they put too high a price on her, find yourself some other concubine as quickly as possible and take her home to fulfill your parents' hopes. Whatever you do, don't wait, for with no concubine and no money, you'll be in real trouble. You're in love, but since I've taken a vow of brotherhood with you, I cannot remain silent. Please don't take offense at me for being so blunt."

Lu Shu's face flushed as he listened to what Jia Ming had to say. "I may be ignorant, but I could never take offense at your valuable advice," he said. "However, I have talked this over with Fragrance, and I know that she has feelings for me. Several letters have been written calling on her uncle to come, and I'm told he will definitely be here in the eighth month. Assuming he does come, one word from him could clinch the matter. That's why I've been sitting about instead of looking for another concubine. However, your mentioning this has really cleared things up for me. I must start making my plans as soon as possible." As they were talking, Wu Zhen, Yuan You, and Wei Bi had come in one after the other. When everyone had had his breakfast, Jia Ming invited them to Qiang Da's for lunch.

Here my story branches off to tell of Lu Shu's uncle, Xiong Dajing. As head of the accounts department of the Salt Administration, he was kept extremely busy, with no time to spare for family matters. When Lu Shu arrived in Yangzhou, he said only that he had come to visit his aunt. Xiong Dajing had invited him to stay with them, but since his wife was at home to see to his nephew, he had not concerned himself with the young man. On the eighteenth of the sixth month he had invited his departmental colleagues to an excursion on the lake. Among them was one who remarked on Lu Shu's lavish spending in Yangzhou and pointed him out to Xiong Dajing—he was on a boat a good way off, accompanied by a number of prostitutes. Xiong Dajing's anger welled up at the sight. "If the little swine is so debauched, it must be because his father spoiled him," he said. "I had no idea he was carrying on like this in Yangzhou. I'll certainly pack him off home as soon as I can."

"I didn't mean to be so blunt, but I was afraid that your nephew might get into some trouble that could affect you."

"I'm very grateful for your concern."

Meanwhile, Lu Shu had gone on enjoying himself in the boat, oblivious to the fact that his uncle was also out on the lake.

Xiong Dajing returned from the excursion with this concern uppermost in his mind, then took time off from the office and went home early. After supper he told his wife, Mistress Lu, about Lu Shu's behavior. She was astonished, and next morning, after Xiong Dajing had gone to the office, she called in the gatekeeper, Wang Fu. "Wang Fu, do you know where Master Lu spends his time and who the people are that he associates with? What do they do together, and when does he come home at night?"

"When he first arrived, he would go out in the morning and return at the second or third watch, but since the beginning of the fifth month he's been spending only one night here in every four or five. I asked Master Lu's page, Felix, about it, and he said his master had sworn brotherhood with several others and every day they meet and amuse themselves at some house or other in the Scripture Repository, beyond Tanning Gate. If Madam wishes to know the details, you should call Felix in. He'll be able to tell you."

"Is he in now?"

"He goes out every day and doesn't come back until after supper."

"Then bring him to see me as soon as he comes in. There's something I want to ask him."

During the second watch, Felix knocked on the gate. His breath smelt strongly of wine, and he was about to go off to the study to sleep when Wang Fu stopped him. "Not so fast, Brother. Madam wants to see you first. She has something she wants to ask you."

Felix was startled. If Madam is calling me in to ask me questions, he thought, it must be because she's heard what the master's been up to and wants to ask me about it. Should I try to cover up for him? If I do, I'm afraid she'll find out and punish me, but if I don't, the master will be furious. Felix was in two minds and hesitated for some time before it occurred to him that the truth would inevitably come out. The master has used up all his money, he thought, and if I try to cover up for him now, I'll never be able to get back to Changshu. Even if the master does find out, I'll excuse myself by saying that Madam must have heard it from someone outside the family. Having made his decision, he accompanied Wang Fu to the back of the house.

Xiong Dajing had not yet returned, and Mistress Lu was sitting in the central room beneath the lamp, drumming furiously on the table with a pair of ivory tiles. Wang Fu stopped at the entrance and said, "Madam, Felix is here." Felix quickly paid his respects, then stood with his hands at his sides.

Mistress Lu pushed aside the tiles and asked, "Felix, there's something I have to ask you. What sort of people is your master associating with in Yangzhou? What do they do all the time? And why doesn't he come back for days on end? You're his page, so tell me the truth. If you waffle and try to cover up for him, I'll get the master to obtain a warrant and have you taken to the county yamen and beaten under interrogation. Then you'll talk, all right!"

Felix saluted and said, "Don't be angry with me, Madam; I wouldn't dare deceive you. When the master came to Yangzhou, he visited the Parade for amusement's sake, and at a teahouse there he met a man named Yuan who had previously been exiled to Changshu, as well as three other men, Jia, Wu, and Wei."

"What sort of people are they?"

"Yuan is said to be in the loan business, Jia is a clerk in the local Salt Administration, Wu is a runner for the Yangzhou Customs, and Wei is

the son of a candidate for the Salt Administration. All five of them swore an oath of brotherhood on Little Gold Hill, and since then they've spent all their time amusing themselves at dinner parties with girl entertainers. The master took a fancy to a prostitute called Fragrance in the Scripture Repository outside Tianning Gate. He bought her a gold bracelet and had a great deal of clothing made for her. The first time he stayed the night with her he also spent over a hundred taels. At the Duanyang Festival, they went to see the dragon boats to celebrate Fragrance's birthday. Later she got ill, and they held a service to give thanks for her recovery. On the eighteenth of the sixth month they hired a lantern boat, and the master took her on an excursion around the lake. He's always staying the night at her house. By now he has spent the five hundred or more taels that his father gave him and the hundreds of taels plus several hundred silver dollars that he took from his mother without permission. He has also pawned his gold bracelet, gold rings, gold toothpicks, plus a great deal of clothing and spent all the money in that same place. Everything I've told you is the truth. I wouldn't dare deceive you."

Mistress Lu was aghast. "But he came to Yangzhou just to see me! Why did he bring so much money with him?"

"Madam, you must know that my master does not get along with his wife and that they've never had a son. My master's father gave him the money and told him to come to Yangzhou, buy a concubine, and bring her back with him. Did the young master ever mention that to you?"

"Don't be silly! If he had, I would never have let him go out and run wild like this! You're his page, and you came with him to Yangzhou. When he started to go out and squander his money like this around town, why didn't you come and tell me? Now that he's spent all his money, how am I ever going to face his parents? Is your master coming back today?"

"He's staying the night there. He told me to come back on my own."

"Go and see him tomorrow and ask him to come back. Tell him there's something I need to talk to him about." Felix promised to do so, then left the room with Wang Fu and went to the study to sleep.

When Xiong Dajing came home, Mistress Lu told him everything Felix had said, and he proceeded to put the blame on her. "I was held up at the office. I couldn't be in two places at once, and I entrusted all these family matters to you. Since your nephew arrived here, he's been living with us a

long time and has actually stayed out for whole days and nights. You were at home, and yet you never even realized! And now he's squandered all the money he brought with him. He may be a useless creature with no idea of the way to behave, but how on earth are we going to face his parents?"

"Well, that's the situation we're in, and it's too late now for any regrets." They made ready for bed.

The next morning Felix got up, washed, and went to the Futura teahouse. The others were already there drinking tea, but Lu Shu had not yet arrived. Felix paid his respects, then joined the other pages at their table for breakfast. Afterward he left for the Jinyulou to convey his aunt's invitation to Lu Shu.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

*A talk between aunt and nephew ends in a bitter outburst,
And a quarrel between husband and wife leads to jealous rage.*

Lu Shu was in Fragrance's room, standing beside the dressing table and watching a maid comb Fragrance's hair. He held a white copper tobacco container in his hand and was bending over to fill Fragrance's pipe. When Felix arrived at the Jinyulou, he went upstairs and stood in the doorway of the room before pulling aside the door curtain. The sight of his page at the door gave Lu Shu an uneasy feeling, and he flushed. "What is it?" he asked.

"Sir, your aunt would like you to go back and see her. She has something important to say to you."

Lu Shu frowned. "All right. I'll go after lunch." Felix went back downstairs.

Lu Shu waited until Fragrance had finished her toilette and then had his lunch. Felix had to come upstairs several times to hurry him up before he finally left for his uncle's house. When Wang Fu saw him come in, he sprang to his feet with a cry of "Sir!" Lu Shu acknowledged the greeting and went straight through to the rear quarters, where he greeted his aunt respectfully and took a seat beside her. A servant offered him tea.

"You've been living with us for several months," began Mistress Lu, "and your uncle has been too busy to attend to you. You're young, and we haven't taken you to see the sights, which was very remiss of us. I've been wondering, do you have any other relatives in Yangzhou? Or any friends?"

And why do you stay out for whole days and nights? Last night when your uncle came home he asked me all of these questions, and I didn't know how to answer, so today I sent your page to invite you here for a little talk."

"After I arrived in Yangzhou, I met a man named Yuan who had served a term of exile in Changshu and with whom I had become close friends. I swore brotherhood with him and several others, and I've often spent time with them. Sometimes we've gone on rather late, and they've invited me to stay the night. That's why I haven't come back."

As he finished speaking, Mistress Lu started to weep. "Oh, dear! What evil has the house of Lu committed that we should produce such an unfilial wretch? You lead a riotous life, you squander your money—and then you try to fob me off with all these lies! I expect your father gave you money to come here and buy a concubine precisely because you were behaving wildly at home. He must have thought that taking a concubine would cause you to have a change of heart. When you got here, you ought to have told us why you had come. Of course we'd have helped you find someone and get back home in short order. But you never said a word about it. Instead you went out and took up with a pack of scoundrels and squandered all the money you had brought with you in those frivolous places. Let me ask you this: how will you ever be able to face your parents when you get home? Well, I give up. The trouble you're in is all of your own making. The only thing that concerns me is that your parents are sure to blame my husband and me for it. They'll say our nephew came to Yangzhou with money to buy a concubine and didn't ask a penny from us. Not only did we not find anyone for him, we let him run wild in Yangzhou and spend all his money while we stood by with our hands in our pockets, shutting our eyes to what he was doing. Frankly, if *my* son had gone to stay with you and done nothing but spend a thousand or more taels to no earthly advantage, I'd have blamed your parents, too, in those very terms. But whoever could have imagined that you, you little swine, would fail to tell us anything at all? It would be a false charge against us, but it's not one we could ever refute." As she said this, she began a tremendous weeping and wailing and shed buckets of tears, all the while continuing to revile him.

Lu Shu had been doted on and spoiled from childhood on, and he had a proud and conceited nature. No matter how serious his misdeeds had

been at home, no matter how much money he had squandered, his parents had never raised their voices to him or scolded or cursed him. Now, on hearing his aunt's words, he felt no regret, just a sense of mortification that quickly turned to anger. "There's no need to be so angry, Aunt. In any case the money that I spent I brought with me; I never borrowed a penny from you. If you're afraid my parents will blame you, well, I'll be home soon and I'll explain to them that I never told you anything. You certainly won't get the blame."

This answer only made Mistress Lu more furious. "I say a few words to you, and you flare up! You young people are simply too ignorant! Tomorrow I'm going to write to your parents, and then I'll have a servant take you home. No matter how you carry on there, at least it won't be in front of me, making me angry." She told the maid to call Wang Fu in. "Go down to the dock and hire a boat," she told him. "Tomorrow you're going to take the young master home."

"Very well," said Wang Fu.

"Don't bother, Aunt," said Lu Shu. "You're just afraid that I'll stay on in your house and ask you for a loan when I run out of money. Well, I'm leaving right now. Felix, pack up my bedding and call in a porter to carry the bags."

This retort made Mistress Lu so furious that her limbs turned to ice and she lost all power of speech. Wang Fu tried to dissuade Lu Shu, but Felix called a porter, packed up Lu Shu's bags, and handed them to the man to carry. Still seething with resentment, Lu Shu left by the main gate, accompanied by Felix, who was watching the bags. Wang Fu was afraid that his master might question him when he returned home, so he secretly followed them to see where the bags were taken.

With Felix watching over the bags, Lu Shu arrived at Ridge Street, passed by the Taiping dock, and called in at the Yichang Guesthouse. Wang Fu stood by the gateway until he saw the bearer emerge with only his pole and ropes. Confident that Lu Shu was staying there, he went back and reported to his mistress.

Mistress Lu was both angry and distressed—angry because Lu Shu was so worthless, ill-educated, and full of ignorant opinions, but distressed also because he was the only son on her side of the family, and judging from this behavior of his it would be impossible to preserve the family heritage.

It was the second watch before her husband returned and she could tell him what had happened. "The little swine is admittedly no good," said Xiong Dajing, "but what your brother did was simply too ridiculous. Having given him a lot of money and sent him to Yangzhou to buy a concubine, why couldn't he write and let me know? If I'd known, I could easily have found someone for his son and sent him home again. He would never have been allowed to stay in Yangzhou all this time! Now he's spent all his money, so it's no use even bringing the subject up. Let me go to the Yichang tomorrow and ask him to come and stay with us for a few days while I urge him to go home. That would prevent him from going from bad to worse in that inn. If he continues to behave in this disgraceful manner, we'll never be able to face his parents."

"I'm positive the wretch won't come back."

"In that case, we'll have to think of something else."

Early the next morning he went to the guesthouse, where Felix told him, "Sir, my master hasn't returned from last night."

Xiong Dajing gave a thin smile. "Tell your master that I came here in person to ask him to return to our house and stay with us. My wife may have said some critical things, but I hope that for my sake he'll come back. There should be no animosity between family members. Tell him that from me." Felix promised to do so.

Xiong Dajing then returned to his office and attended to business. On three successive days he called at the Yichang without finding Lu Shu in. He asked Felix if he had passed the message on. "I've told him several times," said Felix, "but he's never said a thing." Xiong Dajing went home and wrote a letter describing in detail what Lu Shu had been doing in Yangzhou, his refusal to take correction, and his move to an inn in a fit of pique, then had a servant deliver the letter to Lu Shu's family in Changshu.

Let me turn to Lu Shu, who, after the scolding from his aunt, had left in a rage and moved into the Yichang Guesthouse. He rented a single room, settling on a rate of two hundred cash a day for the room and board of both master and page, then went back to the Jinyulou, where he sat for quite a long time in Fragrance's room before she finally joined him. "What were you doing that took you so long?" he asked.

"Oh, some hooligans came to Sister Cloud's room downstairs to get a

free tea party and smoke some free opium, and I was called in. If you don't treat people like that with a little courtesy, they get mad and start a quarrel, and before you know it you've got to host a banquet and take the loss. It's far better to go through the motions just to get them out the door and save trouble, rather than . . ." She stood up as Mother Xiao came into the room. "Godmother, please sit down."

Mother Xiao took a seat and turned to Lu Shu: "Master Lu, the other day I spoke to you about several dozen taels that you owe us. Did you bring them with you?"

"As I told you the other day, I've sent someone home for money, but he's not back yet. As soon as he gets here, I'll pay you."

"You speak of getting money from home, Master Lu, but do you know when it will arrive? We can't wait any longer. I can't tell you how many bills need to be paid with that money! Please go to a money shop, any money shop, and exchange something for money. I need it right now. If I didn't need it so urgently, I wouldn't keep on about it, or even mention the fact that you owe me anything. I'd be most grateful if you'd help me out by tomorrow at the very latest."

After she had gone on and on in this vein, Lu Shu finally said, "All right! All right!" She continued her litany of demands and exhortations as she returned downstairs.

"And what about my gold headband?" asked Fragrance.

"I'll have it for you within a few days." She gave a sardonic smile, which made Lu Shu feel distinctly uncomfortable. He had supper there and stayed the night.

Early the next morning he went to the Futura, greeted the others, and joined them at their table. After they had had their breakfast, he drew Yuan You aside. "I've spent all my funds, and Mother Xiao is badgering me for money. Let me put this to you: I'd like to borrow twenty or thirty taels at any rate of interest you care to name. When my money comes in, I'll pay back both principal and interest without fail."

"I do have a few taels, but they're all out on loan and can't be recalled at short notice. The other day two interest payments fell due, but because I was always off at Qiang Da's enjoying myself, the debtors never came to see me. Instead they brought their payments to the house, where my wife received them. They add up to about a dozen taels in all. Let me go home

and collect them. We'll meet here again tomorrow, and you can have the money then. As for your talk of interest, don't be ridiculous!"

"I'd be ever so grateful." The two men returned to the table, where they joined in the conversation before going their separate ways.

Yuan You's wife, Mistress Du, had quarreled with him more than once because he frequented the brothels and often stayed out overnight. His parents had tried to intercede, but to no avail, and by now they had become accustomed to the situation and simply let the pair go on quarreling. Yuan You, who had now been away from home for three nights in succession, returned this evening because he had promised to lend Lu Shu some money. After supper, he went to their room and said to his wife, "—— and —— brought in their interest payments. Get them out for me."

"What do you want them for?"

"Brother Lu has asked if he could borrow some money. I agreed, and that's why I need the payments. I'm going to put them together and lend them to him."

As soon as she heard the name Lu, Mistress Du realized that he was one of her husband's carousing companions, and anger welled up inside her. "This fellow Lu is from out of town, he's not in business here, and he spends all of his time drinking and whoring. If you give him a loan, what security will you have?"

"When I was in Changshu, I was indebted to him and his father for many great favors. Now that he's here in Yangzhou, how in good conscience can I turn him down the first time he opens his mouth and asks to borrow a few taels? Moreover, he says he's sent someone home for more money, and as soon as he gets it, he'll repay me. But even if he didn't repay it, I'd still feel honor bound to lend it to him."

"What a clever answer! It doesn't occur to you that we never used to have any property of our own. All we had was the money we raised on the clothes and jewelry from my trousseau. At first you said you'd lend it out at interest to supplement the income we got from the family. But these days you've become so obsessed with playing around that you can't even be bothered to go and collect the interest. Fortunately, the debtors were honest enough to bring the money here. I don't know how many nights in a row you've spent with those whores, or how much you owe them, yet you come home and tell lies like this to trick me out of the money, just so

that you can play the tycoon. Even if this story about Lu were true, I still wouldn't make that kind of loan. With him it's a case of 'hit a dog with a meatball, and you won't see it again.' I'm going to keep on at you about this. I won't wait until I'm dead for that interest money. Hurry up and recall those damned loans for me. If you're willing to die, I'm willing to bury you. Once I have the money back, we'll see just how much longer you can go on playing the phony tycoon! One of these days you'll make me so furious that I'll go storming down to those whores and vent my anger by tearing the witches to shreds!"

"A wife ought to know something about the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues. When people hear such jealous talk as that, they're bound to laugh at you."

Stung by the accusation of jealousy, Mistress Du began to wail. "You fool around all the time, sleeping with those whores, and never once have I interfered. You come home today and want to trick me out of some money so that you can go back to the whores and get yourself off.¹ *You're* not afraid of spending all your money; you can live off your whores. But we wives are helpless. Where can we go? I give you just a few words of advice, and you accuse me of being jealous!"

"When a woman marries, she always wants the best from her husband, but I've had a wretched fate. During the years when you were always getting into trouble, you were tried and locked up in jail, and I was scared out of my wits and couldn't sleep at night. Later, when you were sentenced to exile, I was left at home living on gruel and soup, waiting anxiously until you had completed your sentence and could return. And what did you say to me then? You said that you would stop leading a riotous life, that you'd pull yourself together and put your mind to making a living. I thought then that you were that pearl beyond price, a prodigal son who had turned over a new leaf. But you tricked me into pawning all the clothes and jewelry from my trousseau. You said you would lend the money out at interest to supplement our family income and enable us to get by. But ever since this Lu fellow arrived in Yangzhou, he's been the bane of our existence. You've taken some drug that's affected your mind, that's what you've done—you've lost your soul to those whores. *And I let you do it!* And now today you want to trick me out of my money *again!* What hope do I have? I don't want to go on living anymore!" She tried to ram her head into his stomach.

From listening to her tirade, Yuan You was already in an angry mood. He was on the point of standing up and striking her when she came charging at him. Turning aside, he grabbed at her hair. Her jade hairpins fell and shattered; her silver ear picks were flung to the floor. More furious than ever, she tried to grab his queue, but instead her nails made two scratches on his left cheek. He became angrier still and, gripping her hair, threw her to the ground, then sat astride her and was about to pound her with his fists when Maid Chen came rushing in and pinned his arms behind his back, while he reeled off an endless string of curses. His parents, who were deeply distressed that he and his wife were constantly quarreling and would never listen to reason, at first ignored the quarrel, but when they heard their son throw his wife to the ground and prepare to beat her, they feared it might lead to serious trouble and rushed forward and shouted at him. Not daring to argue with them, Yuan You relaxed his grip, then stood up and went outside. His mother pulled Mistress Du to her feet and tried to calm her, but she was in such a rage that she flung herself down on her bed, clothes and all. Husband and wife were now on even worse terms than before.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY

Yuan You makes plans to marry a concubine;

Paria swears an oath to take a husband.

Yuan You had fought with his wife over money but had not dared defend himself against his parents' reprimands. He managed to control his temper and, still seething, made his way to Qiang Da's. As it happened, there were no clients in Paria's room, and Sanzi showed him in, while the maid offered him tea and tobacco. Paria noticed his silence as well as the furious look on his face. She also noticed the scratches on his left cheek and wondered who he had been fighting with. After he had been sitting there for some time, she engaged him in a good deal of idle conversation before asking in a casual tone of voice, "What happened to your cheek?"

"Don't ask!" he said, both angry and embarrassed. "A good friend of mine wanted to borrow a few taels and I couldn't very well refuse, so I promised to give him a loan tomorrow. When I went home today to collect the money, my shrew of a wife not only hid the interest payments that came in over the past few days, she went on and on making all sorts of unreasonable accusations. That got me mad, and I grabbed hold of her hair and was about to hit her when she put up her hand to ward off the blow and her nails caught my face. That made me even angrier, and I lost my temper and threw her to the ground and punched and slapped her I don't know how many times. But then my parents told me off, and I let her up and came straight on here. From now on I'm going to treat that shrew as if she were dead. Fortunately, I'd just told someone to find me another place

to live outside the compound. If I'm blessed by heaven, the family line won't die out and I'll have a son to carry on after me. I wonder who she'll quarrel with then?" He was still seething with anger.

While she listened to this tirade Paria was preoccupied with thoughts of her own. After I had that strange dream, she mused, I went the next day to burn incense at the Temple of the White-Robed and asked for that fortune. Since then I've been constantly watching to find out what this fellow Yuan is really like. He seems extremely kind and gentle, and he's only ten years older than I am. As for his finances, he's not rich, but judging from what he's always saying, he's capable enough and can earn a living. I'm seventeen, and I've been in the business for four years now. Think of it—when I arrived in Yangzhou and was indentured to one of the houses, I had several clients in the daytime and had to take another one overnight. Whether he was old or young, good or bad, I simply had to take him. If he was a decent person, it was bearable enough, but if he was bad, he wouldn't care whether I lived or died. After catching many unmentionable diseases, after more than a year of misery, and after endless wheedling and deception, I managed to change my status to split-fee. I've had every kind of experience, both good and bad. Nowadays the fellows out there are more crafty than ever. Not only do they have no money to spend on you, they would dearly love to have you support *them*! Even more absurd, the Yangzhou custom is for a girl to take a private protector, but nine times out of ten the protector is no good. He will get jealous; he'll want to make requests; and you will have to flatter him to the skies. If there's anything not completely to his satisfaction, he'll find some way to do terrible things to you; and you won't be able to stand his filthy temper. But if you don't have a protector, someone will want a special relationship with you while someone else is clamoring for a friendship, resulting in a stupid quarrel. And lately a new kind has emerged, men who band together in groups of three or four, full of threats and bluster. I don't know what sort of vicious behavior they mightn't be capable of. When they come to this place, they merely want to drink for nothing or get some free opium to smoke. I remember one day when several of them were having dinner here. They forced me to drink several large cups of wine, and afterward I vomited and nearly died of alcoholic poisoning. When I consider that both my parents are dead, and that I have no brothers or sisters but am on my own, even

if I were to become attached to this dangerous scene, what would I gain by it? If my luck were bad and trouble broke out, I might not even survive. In these years of suffering, the one good thing is that I haven't become addicted to opium. I live frugally; I've even saved up a few taels and bought myself some clothes and jewelry. Luckily, I'm not engaged to anyone and I don't have a husband, so I can make my own decisions. I've long wanted to marry and escape from this sea of woe, but as the saying goes, "It's easier to find a priceless gem than to meet a loving man." In these years I've never met a truly understanding person. For some time I was thinking of marrying this Yuan, but when I heard that his wife was so jealous, I never opened my mouth about it. From what he says today, though, it seems that he has definitely decided to take a concubine. Fortunately, he means to find a place to live away from his house. If I go with him, no matter how jealous his wife is, I'll be living somewhere else, and she won't be able to run over every day and start a quarrel. Moreover, the bodhisattva's fortune said I was to marry someone with the surname Yuan, and I can't afford to let this opportunity slip. Time goes by so fast, and I've seen so many in this business who, once they start to go downhill, are scorned by everybody and reduced to begging in the streets. Now, there's true misery for you! I once read a poem in the *Bamboo Branch Poems of the Yangzhou Pleasure Quarters* that ran like this:

Money is easy to get, as you know,
 But how many save up for future needs?
 The opium habit makes your face look old,
 And who will love you when your youth recedes?

When that happens, it's too late for any regrets. Now that Yuan and his wife are at loggerheads, and he's so full of enthusiasm for taking a concubine, let me gradually sound him out. By arranging a marriage, I'll escape the fate of those who lose their youth and have nothing at the end of their lives.

Now that her mind was made up, she proceeded to give him some highly disingenuous advice. "I don't mean to criticize, but what your good lady said was perfectly correct. She's afraid of your playing around and squandering money. Every woman, when she marries, hopes for the best from

her husband. You stay out and don't go home, but a wife has narrower concerns, and of course she's going to tell you off! You ought to be more tolerant with her, but whatever you do, you should never raise your hand against your lawfully wedded wife. You were wrong to do that. Now, take your time, get a little rest, and pay attention to what I'm saying—Maid Zhang, come and fill up Master Yuan's pipe! Enjoy yourself here for a while. I won't invite you to stay on—you should go home soon. As they say, 'Husband and wife should never let the sun go down on a quarrel,' and 'Otherwise the marriage will be ruined.' An affair is actually better than a marriage in that respect; after all, it's a temporary relationship that's soon over, and then the lovers go their separate ways."

Yuan You gave a cynical smile. "Stop! Enough of this sanctimonious stuff! As the old saying goes, 'Like supports like.' I'm not just saying this for your benefit, but if I ever sleep with that shrew again, I'm not of woman born! You have another good client, and you're just saying this to drive me away. Well, Mount Ling¹ doesn't have the only temples in the world—incense is burned everywhere—and I daresay there are other places I can go."

Maid Zhang was standing beside him filling the pipe when she heard him say this, and now she spoke up: "There's no need to say those things, sir. Every married couple has their quarrels. What our Miss Paria gave you was good advice, well meant, but you took it the wrong way. You two have been close for some time, and not only does she have no other client today, even if she did, she wouldn't keep him once you came along."

Paria's reaction to what Yuan said was to sit on his lap and tweak his ear. "I don't know why you shouldn't take good advice when it's offered. You merely had a quarrel with your wife, and I encouraged you to have a little rest and then go on home, but you had to come out with these totally uncalled-for remarks. If you stay here, all that will happen is that your lady will curse me a bit more behind my back."

"Take your hand away! Tell me this: why would she curse you?"

"Don't try to deceive me. She'll curse one person after another, even me." After she had joked with Yuan You for some time, his anger gradually subsided.

"We've been talking a lot of nonsense. Tell me: have you had any supper?"

"I did have some, but then I lost my stupid temper, and now I feel hungry again."

She had someone bring some pastries for him. "I can't understand how you were able to hit your own wife," she said with a smile.

"Now you know what a terrible person I am! If you marry me, you'll get the same treatment."

"Go ahead, then! And keep right on going—past my door! You must be joking!"

"Don't be so cheeky. One of these days I'll try out my sturdy weapon on you, and then you'll learn just how terrible I am!"

"Stop! You're making me laugh. I've had some experience with that sturdy weapon of yours. It may look like metal, but it's really made of wax." Bantering like this, they made ready for bed.

During the night, she told him explicitly about her desire to marry him. "I know your parents are dead, that you have no brothers or sisters, and that you have no fiancé, only an uncle," he replied. "I wonder how much he would want. Let me be frank with you. Although I do have a little money, it's all tied up in loans, which can't be recalled at short notice. If you do marry me, I'll also have to find another house and furnish it, and for the time being I can't afford that. We'll just have to wait and consider this later."

"Although my uncle has had charge of me for several years, I've also made quite a lot of money for him. I've calculated that we should offer him between seventy and eighty silver dollars when he comes. Whether he agrees or not, he will still need my cooperation. He can't sentence me to a *lifetime* in the business! I can't spend my *whole* life making money for him. If he gives me a hard time, I'll enroll in Chastity House, and then he'll lose both me and the money!"

"Chastity House is easy to get into, but if you want a man in bed with you at night, it'll be hard to find one at short notice. That would be *really* hard to bear!"

"Look, we've been together for months, you and I, and even you don't understand me! There's nothing on earth so bitter as a life of prostitution. Don't you think I've had my fill of it these last few years? I can't wait to find some pure, clean place where I can enjoy a few years of carefree happiness. If I could do that, I'd die content."

"What you're saying sounds fine, but I'm afraid you don't really mean it. If you marry me, you'll soon get jealous like that shrew of mine. Wouldn't *that* be a sorry fate for me!"

"If words aren't evidence enough for you, let's clap hands on it." She held her right hand out of the bedclothes, while he held out his left hand, and they clapped hands together and each made a vow. Everything was now settled. They would wait until Paria's uncle arrived in Yangzhou and then give him the money; he would sign a document, and she would marry Yuan You. Paria repeatedly urged Yuan You to find a house lest, when the time came, they should find themselves with nowhere to go. They spent the whole night talking and did not fall asleep until dawn.

They slept on until the sun was high in the sky. Yuan You got up, washed, ate some lotus seeds, and left for the Futura teahouse, where he found the brothers drinking tea. They hailed him and invited him to join them, and the waiter poured him a cup of tea. Wu Zhen noticed the two scratches on Yuan You's cheek and had a fair idea that they resulted from a domestic squabble. "Brother Yuan, who have you been taking on?" he asked. "Who's been picking on you? Tell us, and we'll go and settle the score for you."

If you are wondering how Yuan You replied, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

*A brothel turns a cold face toward an insolvent client,
And a prodigal shows a foolish heart in a passionate dream.*

When Wu Zhen noticed the two scratches on Yuan You's cheek and asked who he had been quarreling with, Yuan sighed. "Dirty linen shouldn't be washed in public, I know, but yesterday a friend asked me to lend him a few taels, and when I went home last night to collect them, my shrew of a wife not only hid the money, she said a whole lot of vicious things to me. That made me angry, and I lost my temper and grabbed her hair and was about to hit her. We were flailing away at each other when her hand struck my face and left me with these scratches. I threw her on the ground and hit her many times with my fists, but then my father intervened, and I stopped. I've been stewing over it all night. I'm telling you this, brothers, but you mustn't laugh at me."

"Of course not," said Wu Zhen. "But show me a marriage that doesn't have its troubles. I don't mean to criticize, Brother, but you and I both go out and play around, and often we don't go home, so we do bear some of the blame. Women have narrow concerns. Because of my liking for amusement, my own wife keeps tight control of our money; she's afraid I'll squander it—and that's a good thing. Brother, you shouldn't have been so rash as to raise your hand against your wife. You were wrong there. 'What's ruined is the marriage.' Brother, I beg of you, don't do it again." The others also chimed in with good advice, which Yuan You accepted.

When they had had their breakfast, Yuan You pulled Lu Shu aside. "About that matter we discussed yesterday, you'll have to wait another two or three days. That'll give me a chance to go out and collect a couple of interest payments, which I'll put together for you."

"My problems have caused you trouble in your marriage, and I feel terrible about it."

"Not at all! That shrew has quarreled with me before. She didn't start her nagging on your account." They returned to the teahouse, exchanged some conversation with the others, and then went their separate ways.

Because he had not received the loan from Yuan You, Lu Shu went back to the Yichang Guesthouse, had lunch, and then sent Felix off to pawn several items of clothing for a dozen taels. At the money shop he changed some of the money into several thousand cash and told Felix to pay for their room and board and keep the rest for incidental expenses. He took the remaining ten taels to the Jinyulou, where he went up to Fragrance's room and sat down. Seeing him arrive, Mother Xiao promptly followed him upstairs and asked for money. He took out the ten taels and said, "Take this for now. When my money arrives, I'll come and see you."

She took the money. "Master Lu, as I've told you several times, I was hoping you would pay me several *dozen* taels. I simply can't tell you how many expenses depend on your money. And now, after all this time, you give me *ten taels*! It's utterly useless. What can I do with it?"

"Take it for now, and I'll bring you some more soon."

Muttering "Please do! Please do!" she made her way downstairs again.

"What about that headband I asked for?" said Fragrance.

"My money hasn't come in yet, so how can I get you your headband?"

"Oh, that's my mistake—I should never have made such a pointless request. If you had any money to spend, you'd want to give it to that soul mate of yours. You and I, we just scrape along as lovers in name only."

"It makes me mad to hear you say that!" exclaimed Lu Shu in exasperation. "When I was still at home, perhaps I did play the field, but in Yangzhou you're the only one I've ever loved. I'm ready to swear to it. Don't be so sarcastic."

"Don't pretend to be upset, Master Lu. You're a decent man, and I maligned you just now. But if you leave me even for a moment, I always imagine that you're doing something on the sly, particularly now that you're

living in a different place. If you're happy with her, of course you'll pick out something that she's set her heart on in order to please her. By rights, I oughtn't to criticize you at all. If I want something from you, no matter how I ask, it's up to you whether to get it for me or not. As the saying goes, 'Let the tempest rage, the ship will not leave port.' From now on I shan't bring it up again. Don't be angry with me."

Furious as Lu Shu was, he couldn't very well say anything lest he be laughed at. Now deeply depressed, he lay down on her bed and pretended to sleep. Fragrance did not play any little tricks on him, as she would have done in the past; she simply let him sleep there on his own. A pipe between her teeth, she went off to Cloud's and Lute's rooms to chat. When supper was laid out on the table in her room, the maid had to call her several times before she came and, with marked indifference, ate her supper in Lu Shu's company. Then she washed her hands and face, reapplied her makeup, and, with the pipe again clenched between her teeth, went back to Lute's room, leaving Lu Shu lonely and forlorn.

The sight was too much for the maid, who came forward solicitously and replenished the pipe and offered him tea. She also tried to find some small talk to distract him with. At the second watch, feeling bored, he asked her to make up the bed so that he could sleep. Only when the clock struck two did Fragrance finally come to bed. Lu Shu made some tentative overtures, but she angrily repulsed him, and as a result they slept in the same bed but not together.

A few days later, Yuan You borrowed ten taels and gave them to Lu Shu, who handed two to Fragrance for incidental expenses and the other eight to Mother Xiao. "I do have some understanding of how things are, despite the fact that I've been dunning you for money," she said. "But with you here all the time, Miss Fragrance cannot take on any other clients. My daughter Cloud is pregnant and can't take too many these days. Lute is supposed to be indentured, but how many overnights can she do in a month? I owe a lot of rent, and the landlord is pressing me for payment. If I can't pay him the next time, we'll have to move out, and then we won't even have a place to live. The firewood shop, the rice shop, the butcher's stall, the fish stall, the distillery, the wine shop, the fruit and general stores—they're all demanding money from me every day. There are also the monthly interest payments, the high-interest payments to the Huizhou

moneylenders, payoffs to the runners, gratuities, invitations, and so on. To run this accursed place, you need several thousand cash every day just to get by. And there's one other big concern: Miss Lute will soon be coming to the end of the term, and her family will be here to collect the new payment. I was hoping that you would give me several dozen taels, to help with various odds and ends and leave a few taels over to go toward Miss Lute's payment. Instead, you wait a few days and give me these nine or ten taels! If you want me to tot it up for you, you've had all those overnights, and you've eaten many meals here. I feel as if I'm 'carrying a load of straw on a rainy day; the further I go, the heavier it gets.' Now, sir, please be good enough to come up with a complete solution, one that will clear up all your debts and help me out. Otherwise, I won't be able to carry on. I'm being hounded by creditors, and you're one of our long-term patrons, as everybody knows. Why, you're embarrassed about it yourself. Just think for a moment, sir: am I right or not?"

She turned to Fragrance. "Miss Fragrance, I don't mean to criticize, but as a member of our staff, you know the trouble that I've been in for days now. You ought to speak to Master Lu about it and ask him to help me. One word from you would be worth ten of mine."

"Don't blame *me*, godmother! Not a day goes by that I don't speak to him about it."

The two women went on and on until Lu Shu lost patience. "Look, there's no need to go on pestering me like this. Give me a day or two, and I'll clear up all my debts."

"May Buddha grant you several sons with large heads!" Mother Xiao stood up and repeated her exhortations before finally going downstairs again.

Lu Shu remained in her room, but Fragrance treated him like a new client. She didn't even exchange any quips with him, and she spent more time amusing herself in the other rooms than in her own. At night, when she finally got into bed, she said, "Give the stinking old bag a few more damn taels, why don't you, and spare us all her pestering. When you left here the last time, she kept on at me, saying I wasn't helping her get the money from you—a whole lot of unbearable accusations. I'm not used to hearing such hateful things from her. Look, do me a favor, will you? Just give her the money tomorrow. That would do it! You and I would be on good terms,

and I wouldn't have to suffer." Lu Shu knew that his money had all been spent and that it was impossible to pay Mother Xiao, but he couldn't say so to Fragrance and was forced to give her a vague promise instead.

The next morning, after he had washed, Fragrance said, "I had no change left yesterday, and I didn't send anyone out for lotus seeds. You'd better go to a teahouse on the Parade for breakfast and bring some money with you when you return."

Feeling highly uncomfortable, Lu Shu left Fragrance's room and went downstairs, only to be confronted by Mother Xiao. "Master Lu, *please* help me with that matter we spoke about. I need to pay people." Lu Shu agreed and went off to the Futura teahouse.

The others were already there. Lu Shu exchanged greetings and joined them in drinking tea. He was depressed, quite unlike his usual self. The others noticed his apathetic manner and asked the reason. He gave them a detailed account of how Mother Xiao had pressed him for money, how Fragrance had cold-shouldered him, and just what she had said.

"*Now* do you believe what I told you the other day?" asked Jia Ming. "If you still don't believe me, try staying away for three days and then going back on the fourth day with nothing to offer. See how they treat you then, and you'll understand, all right. As for the way Mother Xiao and Fragrance are treating you now, that's how all these places deal with their clients—they always play these games before ending the relationship." Lu Shu was in two minds as to what to do. He was still in love with Fragrance, but because Mother Xiao kept pressing him for money that he didn't have, he couldn't visit her. It was impossible for him to see her and equally impossible to stay away.

After they had had breakfast, Jia Ming, knowing what was on Lu Shu's mind, invited them all to Qiang Da's for lunch. Because there was no client in Cassia's room, they were ushered in there, and the maid replenished the tobacco and offered them tea. Wu Zhen and Jia Ming lit the opium lamp and began to smoke. Jia Ming called Sanzi in and said, "Go to the Jinyulou and fetch Miss Fragrance. Tell her Master Lu is waiting for her."

Sanzi was gone a long time. "Miss Fragrance wasn't in," he said on returning. "She's gone off to the Jin compound on an assignment." Jia Ming gave a skeptical smile. He understood the reason; they were afraid Lu Shu did not have the money to pay for an assignment and would only become

an even greater burden to them, so they had concocted this excuse. He nodded but did not pursue the point.

They ate their lunch, and that evening Wei Bi hosted a party. Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, Yuan You, and Wei Bi each had his favorite next to him, and there was much joking and hearty drinking. Only Lu Shu, who remembered how he had been at Fragrance's side morning, noon, and night for months, sat silent and alone, morosely drinking to drown his sorrows, and after several cups he was a little drunk. As he took his leave, the party was still going on. The others knew his state of mind and could scarcely insist that he stay, so, after arranging to meet the next day at the Futura, they let him go off with Felix. Once they had seen him to the door, they went back and resumed their carousing.

With Felix in attendance, Lu Shu left Qiang Da's, but because he had no money he could not go and see Fragrance. On returning to his room at the Yichang, he sat staring at the solitary lamp in utter dejection. He told Felix to use the bedding as a pallet and go off to sleep, while he himself sat alone, his mind ever more gloomy and confused. He lay down on the bed with his clothes still on and thought of how when he arrived in Yangzhou he had spent every day with Fragrance, and how infinitely loving and passionate she had been, whereas now he had to sleep on his own in miserable conditions. He tossed and turned before finally closing his eyes and drifting into oblivion.

Fragrance was saying something to him: "Congratulations, partner, you're going to get your wish. My uncle came today, and I explained everything to him. He wanted two hundred silver dollars. I knew you had no money at present, so I took my own private savings and gave them to him. He signed a document allowing me to marry at my own choice without his being involved in any way. You can choose an auspicious day and take me out of here, and then we'll set off for Changshu."

Lu Shu was beside himself with delight. "It's best to trust to luck in choosing a date," he said. He at once told Felix to hire a boat and call a sedan chair as well as several porters and go to the Jinyulou. Beaming with joy, Fragrance checked her bedding and boxes and handed them to the porters, then took leave of all those in the house.

"Master Lu, those debts you owed have all been cleared up by Miss Fragrance," said Mother Xiao. "If I've been at all unkind to you, I hope you

will both forgive me.” At the news that his debts had been paid, Lu Shu was even more delighted. Fragrance took her seat in the sedan chair, while Lu Shu and Felix escorted the baggage to the dock. She alighted from the sedan chair and boarded the boat. They carried the baggage on and paid the sedan chair and the porters.

Just as they were about to start, a young man in his twenties, a sword gripped in his hand, leapt into the cabin, seized hold of Lu Shu, and demanded, “Where do you think you’re taking my wife?”

“She’s not married,” said Lu Shu, “and I’ve just bought her out. What sort of scoundrel are you, to suddenly show up with a sword in your hand and threaten violence in an attempt to seize my wife?” He turned and looked at Fragrance, who was sitting in the cabin, a cynical smile playing on her face, saying nothing. “Why are you sitting there smiling and not saying anything?” demanded Lu Shu. “What do you mean by it?”

“He’s my husband. I’m his wife. What would you expect me to say? By rights, I should be on his side. Why should I favor you?”

“You always said you had no husband, that you weren’t promised to anyone,” said Lu Shu in great agitation. “All you had was an uncle. Where does this husband come from?”

“You’re an intelligent person, so how can you be so stupid? At first, when you had money, I didn’t have a husband. Now that your money’s all gone, why can’t I go and live with my husband? We in the business always lead a new client on by saying we have no husband. We want to deceive him. If we didn’t do that, he’d never be willing to lavish any money on us. If I really meant what I said about marrying, I’d be giving myself to this person one day and that person the next, and even if you chopped me up into tiny pieces, there still wouldn’t be enough of me to go around.”

“Even if he is your husband, you and I had such love for each other, how could you look me in the eye and say that?”

“That’s even more ridiculous. Haven’t you heard the saying ‘In love affairs, when the money goes, the love goes, too’? You’ve played around all this time, you’ve spent a good deal of money, and you’re *still* so muddle-headed!”

“That may be, but now that you’re pregnant . . .”

Fragrance burst into peals of laughter before he could finish the sentence. “You’re *really* deluded! Not only am I not pregnant, I have never

been pregnant. If I were, well, whenever we in the business get pregnant, we pick out a good client with plenty of money and insist that he is the father. The birth is the time to get him to produce his money and pay for the delivery as well as all the postnatal expenses. Now that you've spent all your money, why should *you* care whether I'm pregnant or not? Even if I were, if I gave birth to a girl, I'd naturally keep her and raise her to carry on earning money after me. If I had a boy, I wouldn't just let you have him for nothing. Even if I were willing to give him to you, you surely don't imagine you'd be able to take the baby home with you and bring him up?"

At these words, Lu Shu felt as if he had been pitched bodily into ice-cold water; even his heart froze up. In his fury he wanted to go on arguing with Fragrance, but the young man who held him in his grip said, "You stupid son of a bitch! My wife slept with you, sacrificing the body her parents gave her, while all you did was spend a little stinking money. And now you go in for all this sniveling nonsense in hopes of making off with her!" As the sword plunged into his chest, Lu Shu let out a great cry.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Lu Shu returns home thanks to contributions from his brothers;

Wu Zhen incurs hatred in his dealings with a borrower.

Lu Shu was held in the grip of Fragrance's husband, whose sword was plunging into his chest. He let out a great cry and awoke from what proved to be a dream, his whole body dripping with sweat. He glanced at the lamp's faint glimmer and the bright moonlight outside the window and was astonished. Fragrance has been so affectionate, so infinitely loving, and she's sworn so many oaths and taken so many vows, he thought, I can't believe she could say such things or be so heartless. It must be my own suspicions that have given rise to this dream. But then his thoughts took another turn. Although she used to be so nice to me, ever since I failed to give her that headband she asked for, she's been quite different. Perhaps she really is the way she appeared in my dream. With thoughts such as these running through his mind, he got no sleep.

At first light he called Felix. "What's the matter, Master?" asked the page. "Why are you getting up so early?"

"Don't ask questions, just get me the water for my wash." Felix rushed off to get it. After Lu Shu had washed, he left the inn and went straight to the Futura teahouse, but he had arrived too early; the others were not there yet. He poured himself a cup of tea and waited for some time until, one by one, they came in. After greetings had been exchanged, they joined Lu Shu at his table and ate their breakfast.

As they were chatting, the steward from the Jinyulou, Drummer Hua,

came up and greeted them, then walked around to where Lu Shu was sitting, bent down, and whispered in his ear: "Sir, yesterday you sent someone to fetch Miss Fragrance. She should have come to attend on you, but she was out on assignment at the time. I hope you and the other gentlemen won't hold it against us. When Miss Fragrance returned from the assignment, she asked after you as soon as she came in the door. When she found that you hadn't been to visit her yesterday, she cried all night, and the first thing this morning she told me to come over and invite you."

"I've been going there for months," said Lu Shu, "and in all that time she has never been out on an assignment, but yesterday, when I wasn't there, she just happened to have one at the Jin compound or the Yin¹ compound or wherever it was. Look, you don't need to cover up for her; I know why she didn't come. You were afraid I didn't have the money."

"Just what are you saying, sir? I can understand that you might be suspicious, but by a very odd coincidence she really did happen to have an assignment at the Jin compound yesterday. If you don't believe me, you can check it out for yourself. You and Miss Fragrance have been close for a considerable time, and you shouldn't be too quick to suspect her. Even if you didn't have the money to pay for an assignment, she would still have gone there just to be with you."

Jia Ming, who was listening, recognized this as mere persiflage on Drummer's part. "There's no need to keep on about it," he said. "Master Lu will visit your house quite soon."

"I hope all of you gentlemen will favor us with your company," said Drummer. "Do come and enjoy yourselves." He turned to Wei Bi: "Miss Lute asks you to be sure to pay her a visit. She says she has something important to tell you." Wei Bi gave a noncommittal reply.

Drummer took a few steps away, then turned and addressed Lu Shu again: "With regard to what the owner said to you the other day, sir, please do as she asked. She needs the money today to meet her expenses."

"I know," said Lu Shu. After further exhortations, Drummer finally left.

"Brother Lu," said Jia Ming, "do you believe what Drummer said about Miss Fragrance missing you and wanting you to visit her?"

"Perhaps she did send him over to invite me. I'm not sure."

"Worthy brother, don't be misled, I beg of you. Yesterday when you asked for her and she didn't come, we realized that they wanted to keep you away. Everything he said today about inviting you was false; the only true thing was that they want money from you. If you have money and go there and pay them today, they'll fawn all over you the way they used to. If you don't have any, you're likely to get the cold treatment. Besides, if you have no money, you won't want to go there empty-handed. As I told you yesterday, when people in that business want to pick a fight with a client, they always act like that."

"How many good-hearted people are there in that business?" asked Wu Zhen. "The only thing they have eyes for is money."

"That's a little hard to accept," said Yuan You. "As the proverb says, 'Sex doesn't lead us astray, we lead ourselves astray.' There are some in the business who are simply infatuated with their clients. In a word, it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. These pleasure quarters are also part of our karmic fate from a previous life."

"I think Brother Lu has treated Fragrance rather well," said Wei Bi. "He's spent a great deal of money on her, and perhaps she couldn't bring herself to be so heartless after all."

"There's no point in trying to guess," said Jia Ming. "Let's wait and see how things develop."

As Lu Shu listened to the give-and-take of opinion, he recalled his dream of the night before and wished that he could grow a pair of wings and fly down to the Jinyulou and put Fragrance to the test. But he had no money, and he was afraid of Mother Xiao's nagging. In his anxiety and restlessness, both staying and leaving were equally repugnant to him. Yuan You understood how he felt and invited everyone to a restaurant for lunch, to the Futura for afternoon tea, and then on to a party at Qiang Da's in the evening.

When the party broke up, Lu Shu returned to the Yichang and told Felix to make him a pot of strong tea, then sat morosely sipping it, while Felix stood by his side. "Go off to bed," said Lu Shu. "I'm going to sit here for a while."

"I deserve to die for saying this," said Felix, "but there's something I have to tell you."

"If you have something to say, why not say it?"

"Sir, your father gave you money to come to Yangzhou and buy a concubine, but after arriving here, you never looked for one, you just spent a lot of the money you'd brought with you. I've noticed the way the people at Miss Fragrance's place have been treating you recently; it's nothing like what it was, but you continue to dote on her in the same way as before. Sir, your money is gone, your valuables are sold, and your clothes are in hock. In my humble opinion, those people will insist on payment for Miss Fragrance; they'll never give her to you for nothing. Each day you stay here gets you deeper in debt, and in a few more days, when the autumn wind starts to blow, it'll be no joke, I assure you! If you care for Miss Fragrance and can't give her up, in my humble opinion you ought to hurry home and explain everything to your father, get a few hundred taels from him, and then return to Yangzhou, buy her, and take her back with you. Why stay on here to no purpose? Think about it, sir. Am I right or not?"

Lu Shu sighed. "Don't be silly! Of course I want to go back, but I spent all my money without managing to buy her out, and now I've sold a lot of valuables and pawned many of my clothes. If I do go back, how am I going to face my parents? Moreover, I owe the Jinyulou a great deal of money, and they'll never let me leave. Finally, I don't have a penny for the boat fare. How am I to get back?"

"If you can't face your parents, sir, you should have bought a concubine as soon as you arrived in Yangzhou and taken her straight back with you. Now that your money is gone, there's no point in even mentioning that. As the old saying goes, 'Sooner or later even the ugliest bride has to face her parents-in-law.' Moreover, when you were living at home, you did many things more serious than this, and did your parents ever blame you? As I see it, that's the least of your worries. As for the money you owe the Jinyulou, you've spent so much money there that even if you do owe them a few taels, they would never dare to try and stop you from going back. And as to the fare, you could talk to Master Yuan and the others about it. I see them with you every day, and they're sworn brothers of yours. They'll naturally find some way to get you home."

"I know what to do. You go off to bed."

Lu Shu drank several cups of tea and lay down on his bed fully clothed. The more he thought about his situation, the more bitter he felt, and he got no sleep that night. At dawn he told Felix to get up and bring him his

water for washing, then went to the Futura teahouse and poured himself some tea while waiting for the others, who came in one after the other and joined him at his table. As they were chatting, Drummer Hua came up and greeted them, then asked Lu Shu for money. His tone was not as diplomatic as the day before; he simply demanded the money to take back with him. In front of the others, Lu Shu was too embarrassed to say that he had no money left. "You don't need to go on about it," he said. "This afternoon I'll make a point of bringing it over." Drummer was unwilling to accept this assurance and kept on standing there. Only after repeated interventions from the others did he leave.

Much as Lu Shu would have liked to go and see Fragrance, it was impossible with no money. He would also have liked to go home, but he lacked the fare. In this quandary, he asked Yuan You to move to another table, where he said, "You saw how he was pressing me to pay what I owe the Jinyulou. I was embarrassed to have to refuse. I would like to return home and get some money so that I can come back and pay them, but I don't have the fare. There are also some clothes that I've pawned in Yangzhou, and I can't go home without them. I've thought about this again and again, and I'm hoping that you can come up with some way to help me get home. When I return, I'll pay it back together with the money that I borrowed before."

"Why even mention those few taels of mine? As for the Jinyulou, I know you spent a lot there, and even if you left owing them a few taels, you'd hardly be letting them down. But approximately how much would you need for the fare and the pawnshop fees?"

"I'll leave out the valuables. My clothes were pawned for a dozen or more taels. I also owe several thousand cash in room and board at the Yichang, and then there's the fare on top of that. With a little over twenty taels, I should be able to get away."

"Wait here a minute. Let me talk to the others and see what we can do for you."

"Thank you for everything."

Yuan You went back to the other table and told the sworn brothers what Lu Shu had said. "I don't mean to put myself forward," said Wu Zhen, "but in helping a friend, each of us should consider his own circumstances, not try to compete with the others. We should do what we can individually."

"Quite right," said Jia Ming and Wei Bi.

"There's no time to lose," Yuan You went on. "Today we should order the boat and tomorrow allow Brother Lu to go home. You saw how Drummer Hua was dunning him for money. If we see him here tomorrow, we'll all look bad."

Jia Ming then brought Lu Shu back to join them and addressed the brothers: "Today we'll go back to Qiang Da's for a full day's entertainment, with each person paying for himself, as a farewell party for Brother Lu. Tomorrow morning our parting gifts will enable him to redeem his belongings and hire a boat to take him home."

"Brothers, I thank you all for your great generosity," said Lu Shu, "but you don't need to go to any further expense today." The brothers, however, insisted. After finishing their breakfast they invited Lu Shu to go with them to Qiang Da's while they sent Felix down to the dock to reserve a passage. At Qiang Da's they provided banquets at lunch and supper. As they broke up that evening, they arranged to meet next morning at the Peace teahouse on Ridge Street. This was to avoid meeting Drummer Hua at the Futura, where he would have continued to harangue Lu Shu.

Lu Shu took his leave of the others and returned to the Yichang, where he stayed the night. The next morning he got up, washed, paid for his room and board, and then went with Felix to the Peace teahouse and poured himself a cup of tea. A little later Yuan You came in and joined him, and after some time the others also arrived. "Brother Lu," said Wu Zhen, "please don't think this too little. I'm really hard-pressed these days." He produced two silver dollars and placed them in front of Lu Shu. Jia Ming brought out three taels and Wei Bi a note for four thousand cash; both men handed the money to Yuan You. I was counting on four or five taels from each of them, thought Yuan. Together with the eight taels that I've brought, he might just have had enough to get home. But what they've given him amounts to less than twelve thousand cash, which will not even be enough to redeem his clothes from the pawnshop. No wonder people say, 'You have friends every day when you're wining and dining, but never a one in times of need.' They had two banquets yesterday for which each of them contributed over three thousand cash. Wouldn't it have been better to omit the meals and increase the money that they offered their friend? Although Yuan You thought like this, he couldn't ask them to add to their

contributions, so he simply passed the money along to Lu Shu and thanked the donors.

After breakfast, Yuan You paid the bill, and they all went to the Yichang. Felix was sent off to cash the note. When the various sums were combined and used to redeem Lu Shu's clothes from the pawnshop and pay his bills at the guesthouse, there was nothing left for his fare. "Brothers, get someone to carry the baggage and go on board," said Yuan You. "I want to try something else. I'll be back soon to pay the fare for Brother Lu."

With his page in attendance, Yuan You hurried to a money shop that he dealt with and, after much persuasion, managed to borrow ten thousand cash on a short-term basis. Telling his page to carry the money, he left the Customs and headed for the canal. Felix, who was standing in the bow of the boat, hailed him. Yuan You and his page boarded and went into the cabin, where they gave the ten thousand to Lu Shu. "Brother, this should be just enough to get you home." Lu Shu thanked him again and again, paid his fare, and had Felix buy various provisions. Then Lu Shu addressed his sworn brothers: "I am deeply thankful for the gracious affection you have shown me in your noble city and also for your great generosity today. In a month at the most, I shall return, and, once I'm back here, I shall thank you all again."

"We've treated you very poorly," they replied. "Please don't think too badly of us. When you arrive home, kindly convey our best wishes to your father and mother. Bon voyage! Take care!"

Lu Shu whispered in Yuan You's ear: "Once I've left, I'd greatly appreciate it if you'd go and see Fragrance and tell her I've received a letter from home; something important has come up that requires my immediate return, but I'll be back before long, when all of my debts will be paid, and paid in full. Tell her to take good care of herself and not pine. As for what I promised to get for her, I'll definitely see to it once I return. Tell her not to worry."

Yuan You smiled. "Don't concern yourself, Brother. Of course I'll see to it. I'll definitely pass on everything you've said." Lu Shu kept pressing him, but although Yuan You thought Lu Shu was behaving in a ridiculous fashion, he could hardly say so in front of him and merely promised to do as he was asked. The brothers all said their farewells. Lu Shu walked with them to the bow, and then the four men went ashore and watched as he gave the order to set off.

The brothers went back into the city with their pages and then parted company. In the following days they resumed their practice of meeting at Qiang Da's. Drummer Hua searched for Lu Shu for a couple of days but failed to find him. Later he asked the sworn brothers and learned that Lu Shu had gone home. When he returned to the Jinyulou and told Mother Xiao and Fragrance this piece of news, they both exclaimed, "Good riddance! That man was a thorn in the flesh, and now we've seen the last of him! He won't be bothering us anymore." From this time forth Fragrance began to take on other clients.

Let me turn now to Wu Jingyu, who earlier in the Futura teahouse had retailed some items of gossip to Yuan You and the others. He lived not far from Qiang Da's and had a relationship with Cassia, the split-fee courtesan on Qiang Da's staff. Needless to say, he never had to pay for spending the night with her, and whenever he visited the house, he expected to be offered opium. He also made requests of her and borrowed articles to pawn. Often he asked her for money. She was afraid of what he might do and didn't dare express any of the resentment that she felt. Recently Wu Jingyu had lost heavily in a gambling den, and, seeing that Wu Zhen was a steady client of Cassia's, one who worked for the Customs and was therefore a pigeon ripe for the plucking, he spoke to her and asked if her client would lend him something to pawn. Cassia was not happy about the request, but she didn't like to refuse. She thought hard for a moment, then said, "Speak to him yourself. I'm not going to get involved." Wu Jingyu left the room without a word.

Two days later he went back to Qiang Da's in the afternoon and happened to find Wu Zhen in Cassia's room smoking opium. He pulled aside the door curtain, walked in, and bowed: "Greetings, sir!" When she saw him come in, Cassia scrambled to her feet and welcomed him. Wu Zhen also stood up, returned the bow, and invited him to take a seat, while the maid offered him tea and tobacco. Wu Zhen asked his name, and Wu Jingyu made some small talk before remarking to Wu Zhen, "Let me say that I've long admired you as a good fellow. There's a little problem I have that I'd like to consult you about."

"Please tell me what it is."

"It's just that for several days running I've slipped up and lost money, and I'd like to talk to you about a loan of twenty or thirty thousand cash, at

any rate of interest you care to name, to be repaid in about two months. If you don't trust me, ask your favorite as well as Qiang Da for a guarantee. I definitely won't default."

Wu Zhen didn't like to refuse him to his face. "I see," he said. "Give me a day or two, and I'll get back to you."

Wu Jingyu bowed again and said, "I'd be most grateful," then left and went to one of the other courtesans' rooms. Without letting Wu Zhen know, Cassia sent him a packet of opium so that he could satisfy his habit.

Wu Zhen lay down on the bed again and resumed his smoking. "I've been going out and playing around for years now. I'm not boasting when I say that I'm nobody's pigeon. In fact, I'm something of a tough character myself. What a joke this Wu Jingyu is! I don't know what he takes me for, that he talks so casually of borrowing twenty or thirty thousand of my hard-earned cash. Isn't it ridiculous?"

"That sort of person is none too bright, making a living as a protector," said Cassia. "But since he brought this up, I really think you ought to offer him *something*, no matter how little, if only to prevent a trivial matter from developing into a real nuisance."

"But if I did that, I'd never be able to go out and have any fun. A loan here, a loan there—I simply don't *have* that kind of money! I've run across plenty of protectors and hooligans like him in my time, and even if I don't do a thing for him, he'll never be able to lay a finger on me! If you're thinking he might bear me a grudge, well, those people who caused all that ruckus here, You Deshou and Yan Xiang, were accused by some house or other and a few days ago they were all arrested by order of the prefect and each one was given several hundred strokes with the light bamboo. Right now they're on public display on the Parade, locked up in a large cangue. I'd urge him to cool down a bit, or he may be in for a nasty surprise himself."

"If you have no money to lend him, why didn't you tell him so to his face?"

"I was afraid he mightn't be able to take it, so I hedged, but he's bound to come and ask you about it tomorrow. Just give him my apologies and tell him I said that I don't have any money right now and can't lay my hands on any, either."

"How very clever of you, leaving the hard part to me!"

"But you're not the one he's trying to get a loan out of! Just tell him what I told you."

Several days later Wu Jingyu did come to Qiang Da's and speak to Cassia. "What did Wu Zhen have to say about that matter I raised the other day?" he asked. Cassia told him everything that Wu Zhen had told her in confidence, omitting nothing. Wu Jingyu smiled sourly. "And to think that I took him for a good fellow! I never thought he'd turn out to be such a hypocrite." He stormed angrily out of the room.

Cassia waited until Wu Zhen made his next visit and then told him what Wu Jingyu had said in anger, but Wu Zhen took no notice. Little did he anticipate that Wu Jingyu would bear a grudge and look for some way to ruin him.

If you are wondering what scheme he devised, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

*Runners create a disturbance in a brothel,
And a close friend pays a private visit to a jail.*

Wu Zhen had not only refused to lend Wu Jingyu the money he wanted to borrow, he had also engaged in some bragging, which Cassia reported to Wu Jingyu, holding nothing back. From that reason, Wu Jingyu nursed a grudge against Wu Zhen and tried to think of some way to avenge himself. As luck would have it, at this time the prefect happened to circulate an order to his subordinates to investigate and arrest anyone caught smoking opium. The two counties of Yangzhou, Jiangdu and Ganquan, dispatched many runners to make arrests throughout the city, and numerous rich households suffered harassment and injury at their hands.

In Ganquan county there was a runner named Bao Guang, who had long been on good terms with Wu Jingyu. The latter wanted to avenge himself on Wu Zhen, and since he knew that every evening Wu Zhen went up to Cassia's room at Qiang Da's to satisfy his opium habit, he sought Bao Guang out. "Brother," he said, "I have a present for you."

"What's that?" asked Bao.

"There's a runner for the Yangzhou Customs named Wu Zhen whose family is worth several thousand and who spends every evening at Qiang Da's satisfying his habit. Take a few men with you and around the second watch burst into Qiang Da's, go up to Cassia's room, and seize Wu Zhen and all his paraphernalia. With the perpetrator and the evidence in hand, you need have no fear that he'll get off. I'll be waiting for you in

another courtesan's room, and when you raise the hue and cry, I'll make out that I know nothing about it and come in and act as mediator. He'll be terrified of prosecution, and at the very least you should be able to get a few hundred taels out of him. But how would you propose to split the proceeds?"

"The general rule is twenty percent for the mediator, but I'll give you thirty. There's just one thing: can we be sure about this?"

"Like catching a turtle in a tub! Otherwise, I'd never have come and told you." Having reached agreement, the two men arranged to put their plan into operation that evening.

"Do you know how to find your way to Cassia's room?" asked Wu Jingyu.

"I've been to Qiang Da's several times and had banquets there with courtesans. Hers is the room at the back on the east side, isn't it?"

"That's right. I'll see you there this evening." He took leave of Bao Guang and went home to have his dinner, then left for Qiang Da's.

A group of clients was being entertained at an introductory tea party in Cassia's room, and Wu Jingyu took himself off to Paria's room, which was the one opposite. When Cassia heard that he had arrived, she sent another packet of opium over to him, and he lay down on Paria's bed and smoked. After some time the clients in Cassia's room left, and by an odd coincidence at that precise moment Wu Zhen walked in. The lamp was lit for him, and he began to smoke.

During the second watch Bao Guang gathered his colleagues Xiang Guang and Xu Guang, as well as four or five constables, and had supper with them at a restaurant before lighting three torches and heading for Qiang Da's. Qiang Da welcomed them in front of the reception room. "Is Wu Zhen from the Customs here?" Bao Guang murmured.

"Yes, he's in Miss Cassia's room. Would you like to speak to him?"

"Don't tell him we're here." He had the constables sit in the front of the house, while with Xiang Guang and Xu Guang he went to Cassia's room at the back, pulled aside the door curtain, and walked in. Wu Zhen was lying on the bed with Cassia opposite him, and both were smoking. Wu Zhen had heard steps outside the door, then had seen the door curtain being drawn aside and someone coming in. He thought it must be some acquaintance who had come to see him and scrambled to his feet. Cassia

also stood up and, seeing who the men were, extended a welcome. "God-fathers, please take a seat."

Bao Guang went up to the bed and bowed to Wu Zhen. "Please sit down," said Wu Zhen. Bao sat on the edge of the bed, while his colleagues sat on chairs at either side. The maid was quick to offer them tea and tobacco.

"Your name is Wu?" asked Bao Guang.

"Yes. But I haven't asked you your name."

"I'm Bao Guang." Pointing to the others, he said, "He's Xiang Guang, and he's Xu Guang." Then, pointing to the lamp, he added, "Brother Wu, please go ahead and satisfy your habit." He lay down beside the lamp.

Wu Zhen assumed that he wanted to smoke himself, and he said to Xiang and Xu, "Please come over and smoke."

"We don't smoke, but you go ahead," they replied.

Wu Zhen lay down and made a pellet that he placed in the pipe before handing it to Bao Guang. Bao took it but did not smoke. "How big a habit do you have?" he asked Wu Zhen.

"I'm trying to stop, but I still smoke several a day."

"I wouldn't bother you unless it was absolutely necessary. We're runners for Ganquan county, and our chief has sent us over with an invitation for you."

Wu Zhen was startled. "But who could have accused me? And of what? Kindly show me the warrant."

"No one has accused you. We're carrying out orders to investigate and make arrests. When we have a perpetrator and the evidence in hand, why do we need a warrant?" At this point Wu Zhen realized that his opium smoking was the reason.

Just as he was about to explain himself to the runners, someone walked into the room and bowed to everyone. Invited to take a seat, he said, "I came here for some amusement because I had time on my hands after supper. I was just sitting in the room opposite when I heard you brothers arrive, and I gathered you were here on official business. Our brother Wu here is a good fellow, and when I heard what was happening, I felt I had to come over and ask about it. In all the cases I deal with, I try to find a face-saving compromise, but I'm a layman, unfamiliar with official business. I wonder if you might have some suggestions?"

"We, too, have long admired Brother Wu as a good fellow. So long as he treats us fairly, we'll be able to send him off with a rap on the knuckles."

"I wonder if you'd mind sitting here for a moment while Brother Wu and I go across to the room opposite? We'll have a little chat, and then I'll come back and report."

"Why not? Go ahead and have your chat."

The newcomer took Wu Zhen outside. Wu Zhen had immediately recognized him. He realized that because of his refusal to grant the loan, Wu Jingyu had conspired with these men to scare some money out of him. In his fury he would have liked nothing better than to sink his teeth into Wu Jingyu's flesh, which was why he had let him talk to the runners without acknowledging that he knew him.

Now that he was sitting in Paria's room, Wu Jingyu said, "I didn't mean to speak out of turn, but in my opinion this matter needs to be dealt with as soon as possible. Of course it will cost you a few taels, but at least it will save you from being taken to court. It would be too late then for any regrets."

"What a piece of luck that you just happened to come out and act as mediator!" said Wu Zhen with a sarcastic smile. "Why don't you figure out how much money I'll need to come up with?"

"You and I may not be close friends, but we happened to meet here today, and I've taken it upon myself to get involved. But you'll need to give me some figures before I can start talking to them."

"I may work at the Customs, but I have nothing whatever to do with management. From what these people say, all they've got is a general search-and-seize warrant without my name on it. Well, it's just my bad luck, I suppose. I'll give them twenty thousand cash. I'd be much obliged if you'd tell them that."

"Just wait here a moment."

Wu Jingyu went over to Cassia's room and said to the runners, "Brothers, I have an offer, but please don't be offended by it. I had a talk with Wu just now and he said he had a modest offer that won't fully satisfy you; he's offering twenty thousand cash for all of you. Note that I'm the honest broker here; I don't have any stake in the case. Would you gentlemen deign to accept?"

"Hold others cheap and you cheapen yourself," said Xu Guang. "Twenty thousand, why, it's not even enough for the constables!"

"If he's tried, he'll be sentenced to exile," said Bao Guang. "Even if he chooses to pay a fine instead, he'll still have to put up thousands of taels. Since you've come forward to help him, tell him that if he knows what's good for him, he'll give us at least five hundred. Otherwise, we'll also take Cassia and Qiang Da to court, where they'll have to pay a lot of money as well as face a criminal sentence. Tell him to add up all the costs."

Wu Jingyu went back to Paria's room and spoke to Wu Zhen. "Did you hear what they said?"

"Of course I did, I'm not deaf. If they want hundreds of taels on these trumped-up charges, I wonder how much they'd ask for if I'd committed a murder! To be frank, I may look as if I'm dressed up in grand style, but these clothes are deceptive. Working as a runner for the Customs—that's just a general title. If I tell people I have no money, they don't believe me. If I did have a little, I wouldn't be in this beggarly job. Since our friends found their way to you, I can hardly say that I have no money at all. I'll offer them forty thousand, so that they can buy themselves a dinner. If that still won't do, I'll just have to let them press charges. If it's my fate to be sentenced, I won't be able to escape it anyway."

"Brother, you say they have no warrant, but whether you're right or wrong about that, if you don't take this chance to come to terms with them, you'll be brought to the yamen, where you'll find it a great deal harder to put your money to work."

"It's not that I'm too stupid to see that; the fact is, I really can't raise the money. Tell them that if they don't accept the offer, I'll just have to go to the yamen with them."

Wu Jingyu went back to Cassia's room. "He's prepared to put up forty thousand, not a penny more," he told them.

The runners were furious. "Let's hold him in jail until he raises the money!" they said. They called the constables to the back of the house, where they took out their chains and went to Cassia's room and shackled Wu Zhen. Then they put Qiang Da in chains, too, on the grounds that he had allowed Wu Zhen to smoke a forbidden substance on his premises.

They also put Cassia in chains and were going to take her off with them. Weeping and sobbing, she cried out, "Master Wu, you're burying me alive! I came here from a hundred miles away and endured the disgrace of

making my living in this business. Many of my family depend on me. You and I were *lovers*! Just ask yourself this: when did I ever get a lot of money from you? Yet today you drag me in to be condemned. How can you bear to see that happen? You can't say you have no money at all. Add a little more, and ask these godfathers to do me a favor." Wu Zhen was afraid to involve Cassia in the case, and he asked Wu Jingyu to increase his offer by twenty thousand, but the runners still refused to accept it.

When the runners first arrived, they clearly meant no good, and Sanzi, fearing trouble, had rushed off to get Yu Jiafu. At this point Yu came in and, hearing that Qiang Da was in chains, went straight up to Cassia's room, where he exchanged greetings with the runners. After learning the details of the case, he entered Paria's room and quietly explained the situation again to Wu Zhen, urging him to increase his offer and buy himself some peace.

"I'm most grateful for your concern," said Wu Zhen. "You ask me to increase the payment. It's not that I can't bear to part with the money; the truth is, I just can't raise it. If I agreed to give any more, I wouldn't be able to pay it."

"I'm only trying to help. I'm afraid of what you'll have to go through. Since you can't raise the money, I won't keep on urging you. But you're involving your favorite as well as Qiang Da. What are you going to do about them?"

Wu Zhen whispered in his ear: "Wu Jingyu tried to get a loan out of me, but I wouldn't give him one. He then conspired with these people to come and frighten me into paying, after which they would divide up the spoils. Well, the one who's responsible has to suffer the consequences, and neither Qiang Da nor Cassia has any quarrel with them. Could you promise the runners a bit more money on their account? I won't implicate Qiang Da or Cassia in court, so they needn't take them away."

"That's very generous of you. I'll go and tell them."

"I've had a talk with Wu," he said to the runners. "According to him, he really can't raise the money. I hope you gentlemen can do me a favor and make a reasonable compromise along the lines of what Brother Wu Jingyu has suggested. If you really can't do it, Wu says he'll just have to brace himself and get dressed and let you do your duty. He's prepared to go with you on his own to face a court case. Now I would like to ask you a

personal favor. Qiang Da and Cassia have done all they could; would you agree to leave them behind?"

"By rights, sir, I ought to do as you ask," said Bao Guang, "but Wu Zhen looks down his nose at us. If we don't make an example of someone, he'll never pay up with a good grace. Don't blame us; he even shut you out. You needn't bother about him. As for Qiang Da and Cassia, we'll do as you ask, provided they can show us some respect."

Yu Jiafu spoke to Qiang Da and Cassia. "Now, be a little smarter and offer to host them. I've persuaded them to grant you a favor."

"You know my affairs," said Qiang Da. "Please beg them to do me a good turn."

"Godfather, you come here often, but you have no idea what misery I have to put up with," said Cassia. "I'm indentured here, and every quarter, needless to say, my family comes and takes the money away. But in addition to that, my mother-in-law and husband come several other times during the year, and each time, without any idea of how little I have in my private savings, they clamor for nine or ten strings of cash; they also want their travel paid, and gifts to take back with them, as well as the cost of food and lodging while in Yangzhou, to say nothing of incidental expenses. They came the other day and told me that their house had been flooded and had to be repaired. They also needed money for food, and so on and so forth. They didn't leave until they'd gotten a dozen strings out of me. I had no money to pay them, so I borrowed ten thousand, discounted ten percent, from Godfather Chen at one percent a month over three months. I don't have any good clients, and yet every day I need flowers and incidentals, as well as two pellets of that accursed stuff."

She whispered in Yu Jiafu's ear: "This is all the doing of that hateful Wu Jingyu. I can't *tell* you how many special favors I have to do for that man during the year! Right now I'm burdened with debts running into the tens of thousands. The next quarter's earnings have been mortgaged to pay for this quarter's clothes, and even so I'm never properly dressed. And now on top of everything else *this* has to happen! Godfather, what *can* I do?" She began to weep.

"The King of Hell doesn't make any distinction between rich and poor," said Yu Jiafu. "You may say you have no money, but no one will believe you. If they take you to the yamen, not only will you be disgraced,

you'll also have to pay *them* off. In my opinion, you should forget about your lack of money. Just promise them something, and then think how you're going to get it."

"Thank you, godfather! I hope you'll be modest in what you promise them. I have nothing I can offer you. I'll just have to give you a few more kowtows."

"Don't be silly!" said Yu Jiafu. "You surely don't think I'm going to take your and Qiang Da's money and make them a present of it?"

He told the runners how the two of them had pled poverty and hardship. After lengthy negotiations, they settled on a total of sixty thousand cash, with forty thousand down. The remaining twenty thousand would be due when Wu Zhen had been found guilty in the county court and transferred to the prefecture. If he were found not guilty, the runners wanted the forty thousand in ready cash within one month. Yu Jiafu promised to provide the down payment within three days. Bao Guang agreed but said to him, "You're the one who suggested this compromise, so you'll have to guarantee both Qiang Da and Cassia. I'm not just raising difficulties here. I'm afraid that when Wu Zhen gets to court, he'll implicate them both, and we'll need you to produce them."

"Very well." At last Bao Guang called in the constables and ordered Qiang Da's chains removed. He and his men then lit their torches and took Wu Zhen away with them in chains, together with the opium paraphernalia.

As they were leaving, Wu Zhen rounded on Wu Jingyu and cursed him bitterly. "I had no feud with you, but because you couldn't get a loan out of me, you conspired with others to arrest me. When I get to court, I'll show you no mercy." Wu Jingyu acted as if he hadn't heard a thing and walked quietly away. The runners took Wu Zhen to the yamen, wrote out a charge, submitted the opium paraphernalia, and waited for the magistrate to ascend his tribunal and conduct an interrogation.

Let me turn to Yuan You. That day he had been to a relative's to offer birthday congratulations, and it was not until after supper that he returned to Qiang Da's. When Paria told him what had happened to Wu Zhen, he stamped his foot in exasperation. "How stupid of him! This sort of thing should *never* go to court. Were Masters Jia or Wei in the house when the runners came?"

"If either of them had been here, all of this could have been avoided."

"It's sheer bad luck that I was busy and they weren't here. Oh! This *would* have to happen!" He promptly left Qiang Da's and went to the Ganquan yamen and sought out an old acquaintance, whom he asked for information.

"His Honor just now ascended his tribunal and ordered Wu Zhen to be given thirty blows across the face and to be held in jail," he was told.

Anxious as Yuan You was, it was now nearly midnight and too late to get into the jail, so he returned to Qiang Da's and told Paria what he had learned. When Cassia heard that Yuan You had come from the yamen, she rushed in and asked, "You're just back from the yamen. What's happening with Master Wu?" When Yuan You told her, she burst out sobbing and returned to her room.

Yuan You stayed there that night, then early the next morning hurried in through the main entrance of the yamen and went to the gate of the jail. Because he had once been confined in the Jiangdu county jail himself, he was familiar with prison rules and regulations. Seeking out a jailer by the name of Ge Ai, he asked, "I want to visit Wu Zhen, and I'm prepared to sweeten things for you and your colleagues." When Ge Ai saw that he spoke the prison language, he let him in the gate and led him past the shrine of the prison god to the registration office. There he found Wu Zhen, his whole body shackled, swaying back and forth in the corridor outside the office. His cheeks were red and swollen, and his face was stained with blood.

Seeing the pathetic state Wu Zhen was in, Yuan You went up to him and called his name. When Wu Zhen saw it was Yuan You, tears welled up in his eyes. "Brother, all because of a trivial little request that I didn't grant, that fiend played this vicious trick on me! I expect it will be hard to avenge in this life and I'll just have to wait until the next."

"They may have conspired against you, but it's also the result of your own bad fortune. Set your mind at rest. The important thing is to find some way to get you off."

"When disaster strikes like this, what can I do? I'm held in jail, and I have an opium habit. Last night was more than any man could bear. I have a burning sensation inside me, and if things go on like this, in three or four days I'll be dead."

Yuan You took several pieces of Korean ginseng from the purse at his waist and popped them into Wu Zhen's mouth. "You weren't very strong to begin with. In addition you have an opium habit, and last night you were locked up here and punished. You felt remorse and anger, and you were deprived of opium, so of course you're miserable. The first thing to do is to get the torture instruments removed, then find some way for you to give up opium. After that we can start thinking of how to get you off."

"My boy is still very young, and I've never gotten along with my family—the trouble I'm in will give them no end of enjoyment. And there's no one on my wife's side who's capable of handling things for me, no one who can step forward and take the lead. At present you're like a blood brother. Would you mind acting as mediator? If you need money, go and speak to my wife. Tell her to think of some way of raising it."

Yuan You agreed, then took leave of Wu Zhen and said to Ge Ai, "Brother Ge, let's go over to the teahouse for a little chat." Ge Ai accompanied him out of the prison to a teahouse.

If you are wondering what they said to each other, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

*Jailers are bribed to remove a man's shackles,
And a clerk is urged to change a confession.*

Yuan You invited the jailer Ge Ai to the Great Wave teahouse on the west side of the yamen and chose a secluded table. As the waiter poured the tea, Yuan said, "I'm hoping to get Wu Zhen's irons removed, and that's why I've invited you here for a talk. About how much would it cost?"

"Oh, I can't take the sole responsibility for that. You'll have to ask Master Duan Qinggeng, the supervisor, to come over and discuss it with you."

"If I wait here, could I ask you to go and invite him? I hope you won't take offense. Over and above the cost, there'll be a modest present for you."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. Just wait here while I go and find him. I'll be back soon."

He hustled out of the teahouse and returned after some time with another man. When Yuan You saw them, he jumped to his feet. Pointing to the man he had brought, Ge Ai said, "Master Yuan, this gentleman is Master Duan Qinggeng, the supervisor of our criminal department." Pointing to Yuan You, he said to Duan, "This is Master Yuan You." The two men bowed to each other and sat down. The waiter poured Duan a cup of tea.

After they had exchanged some polite conversation, Yuan You said, "My friend Wu Zhen is being held on opium charges. There's no one in his family to step forward, so I've taken it upon myself to try to get his irons

removed. May I trouble you two gentlemen to help? How much would it be, all told?"

"The chief¹ was interested in your friend's money even before he knew of his reputation for wealth," said Duan Qinggeng. "Since you're prepared to take this on, you should first understand what he wants. The others, senior and junior jailers, prisoner bosses, prisoners, sailors, and watchmen, the fellows on night duty in the various departments, as well as the guards on the main and secondary gates—those people Ge Ai and I can help you with."

"When you ask a favor from officials, you start from where you are," said Yuan You. "Since I sought you gentlemen out, you mustn't turn me down; please take this on. Once you and I have reached agreement, I shan't mind what else is involved."

"Master Yuan, you're setting us a very difficult task. If you're entrusting it to us, it will probably cost at least three hundred silver dollars."

"By rights I ought to accept your offer. But you can deduce the state of my friend's finances from this fact: when the runners arrested him, he would never have been brought here at all if he'd possessed a hundred taels. You can't say he has *no* money, but altogether he can offer about fifty thousand cash for those in the jail, plus an additional ten thousand each for you two gentlemen."

Duan Qinggeng had still made no comment when Ge Ai replied: "You must be joking, Master Yuan! To be frank with you, when I saw him brought in yesterday, I hunted out all my old pawn tickets. In a word, I alone would want well over a hundred thousand. It's no easy matter, pulling in a really big fish like this! The big ones in the Customs rarely fall into our hands. You're talking a few score thousand. Do you really think that will be enough for this deal?"

"No need to lose your temper, Officer Ge. This kind of thing is very hard to calculate. As the saying goes, 'The greater your wealth, the bigger your troubles.' At the risk of offending you gentlemen, let me put this to you: if a completely penniless person were in your custody and there was no money to get the irons removed, you surely wouldn't let him just hang there till he died, would you? It's not that I'm pleading poverty for my friend Wu Zhen, but he really doesn't deserve a reputation as a rich man, and he can't come up with the money. I also cannot promise you any more

money on his behalf. I could benefit from this deal myself, but I'm acting as an unpaid negotiator, and I hope you gentlemen will take that into consideration."

"Officer Ge didn't lose his temper at all," said Duan Qinggeng. "That small sum you mentioned would really not be enough to go around. But please don't take offense."

"To be quite candid, a few years ago I was investigated myself. I was in Jiangdu jail, where it cost me only twenty thousand altogether. It's not that I'm unwilling to agree to more in his case, but the truth is, he just can't raise the money. I hope you will make allowances for that."

Duan Qinggeng and Mo Ai swore that it was not enough. Yuan You repeated his arguments again and again, before finally settling on eighty thousand as a base figure, plus ten thousand extra as compensation for each of them.

"Although you've entrusted this to the two of us, we can't give it final approval until we know what the warden thinks, after which the others are likely to agree. Let's meet again after lunch."

"We've gone over my offer in great detail, and it's all settled," said Yuan You. "Don't try to angle for any more. Not another penny can be added."

"You're a tough bargainer and no mistake! You don't give an inch. Anyway, whether we succeed or not, let's meet after lunch and try to work out a settlement."

They said good-bye and were about to part when Yuan You said, "Just one moment. There's another small concern that I have, and I'd like you to bend the rules for me." They asked what it was, and Yuan You went on, "Wu Zhen is an addict, and if I go with someone to an opium den and heat up a couple of pellets and bring them to the prison so that he can get by for a while, I wonder if you gentlemen would be willing to give them to him?"

"We'd be reluctant to refuse any request you might make, no matter how difficult," said Ge Ai. "Master Duan, you don't smoke, so why don't you go back to the criminal department and wait there while I go with Master Yuan? I'll be back soon." Duan Qinggeng took his leave of Yuan You and left the teahouse.

Yuan You paid for the tea and left with Ge Ai, who led him to an opium den on the south side of the teahouse and invited him to sit down

on an opium couch. He then called out "Opium here!" A waiter promptly handed him some Chaozhou tobacco and asked, "How many would you like?"

"Four, please." The waiter came back with four packets of opium and laid them on a dish. He also poured out two cups of tea. Ge Ai lay down on the bed and said, "Have a smoke."

"I don't smoke," said Yuan You, "but you go ahead." Ge Ai made four pellets and wrapped them up in the packets, then smoked the rest of the opium. Yuan You paid the bill and they left together, with Ge Ai carrying the packets of opium. They had no sooner reached the gateway of the yamen than they noticed Wu Zhen's page, Fazi, lurking about hoping for news of his master. At sight of Yuan You, he came running up.

"Master Yuan, do you know where my master is?"

"This is Wu Zhen's page," Yuan You explained to Ge Ai. "I would like to have him accompany me into the prison. His master can give him instructions, so that he can go home and find some way to deal with this." Ge Ai gave his permission, and Yuan You told Fazi, "Come with me to see your master." Ge Ai led the way into the prison.

When Fazi saw Wu Zhen beneath the eaves of the registration office, his face covered in blood, his arms and legs shackled, he felt a stab of grief and began to cry. "Master, whatever happened to you?" he sobbed.

"Now, don't be silly!" said Wu Zhen, weeping at the sight of his page. "You don't need to ask me. You can get the full story from Master Yuan."

Yuan You told Wu Zhen what Ge Ai and Duan Qinggeng had said, everything but the agreed-upon amount, about which he was purposely vague. "I'd be ever so grateful, Brother, if you'd impress on them that the sooner it's done the better," said Wu Zhen.

Yuan You turned to Ge Ai: "Could you please bring me a bowl of boiled water?" Ge Ai picked up a bowl and went off to the kitchen to fetch the water. With the bowl in one hand, he took two pellets from one of the packets and put them in the water, then stirred the mixture with his fingers, held it to Wu Zhen's mouth, and told him to drink. For Wu Zhen, it was like the elixir of immortality, and in two or three gulps he had finished it.

"I have two more pellets on me," said Ge Ai. "I'll give them to you later." Wu Zhen nodded, then called Fazi to his side and whispered something in his ear. Fazi nodded.

After Yuan You had taken leave of Wu Zhen, he reminded Ge Ai of their meeting after lunch at the Great Wave; whoever arrived first would wait there for the others. Leaving the prison with Fazi, he told the boy to go home and have lunch, then come back that afternoon to the Great Wave to find out what had happened. Yuan You went home, had his lunch, and then went on to the teahouse to await the response from Duan Qinggeng and Ge Ai.

Meanwhile Ge Ai had sought out Duan Qinggeng and reached an agreement with him. The two men went first to the criminal department, where they explained the arrangement clearly to everyone, including the chief officer, messengers, clerks, runners, detectives, gatekeepers, servants, umbrella men, and bearers. Then they went to the prison and explained it clearly to everyone there, including junior and senior guards, prisoner bosses and prisoners, as well as a jail supervisor and all the jail staff. After that, they had lunch at a restaurant. Ge Ai then went to the opium den to satisfy his habit, while Duan Qinggeng went straight to the teahouse, where he drank a cup of tea as he waited.

Ge Ai went on to the teahouse and chatted with Duan while they drank their tea. Yuan You arrived, greeted them, and joined them at their table. "After we left you yesterday, we went to the criminal department and spoke to the chief," said Duan Qinggeng. "The first words out of his mouth were a request for two hundred thousand from your friend. I kept on stressing the eighty thousand. Gifts to the messengers on the gate would, in the usual way, be in addition to that. There are also the senior and junior guards and the various expenses inside the jail, which would also be in addition. Please take that into consideration."

"I cannot go beyond the figure we spoke of before lunch. It cannot be increased."

Duan Qinggeng and Ge Ai shook their heads. "We can't help you with that figure. If you think we haven't tried our best, you should find someone else." They stood up to go.

Yuan You held them back. "Do sit down, please! You're taking me for a novice. If you two won't act on the sum we spoke of, it would be no use asking a thousand other people. Oh well, it can't be helped, I suppose. Wu Zhen's a friend of mine, so apart from not taking a commission for myself, I'll increase the amount by ten thousand out of my own pocket, whether

or not he takes over the debt in the future. Now, be reasonable, gentlemen. We should all resign ourselves to the fact that this is a very small pig we're dealing with and be a little more lenient." But Duan Qinggeng and Ge Ai merely shook their heads and refused. They hung on for another four hours, until Yuan You added another ten thousand, and they finally accepted. After arranging that the money be handed over that evening outside the yamen, Duan Qinggeng and Ge Ai took their leave.

At this point Fazi came up and asked if there was any news. "What did your mistress say when you got back?" asked Yuan You.

"She said she hoped you would handle everything, sir."

"Well, now that we know how much the criminal and prison departments will need, I wonder whether your family has thought of how to pay it."

"The mistress would like to invite you over to our house to discuss it."

Yuan You paid the bill and accompanied Fazi to Wu Zhen's house. He was asked to take a seat in the reception room, where Fazi offered him tea and tobacco before going to the rear quarters and passing on the news to his mistress. Wu Zhen's wife, Mistress Wang, came out and greeted Yuan You, then took a seat to one side. "I am most grateful to you for all your efforts," she said.

"Your husband and I have been friends for a long time. Now that he's been framed and is in serious trouble, it's my duty to do what I can to help. He asked me again and again to take action, and I've negotiated a base figure for the two departments of a hundred thousand cash. Miscellaneous expenses, extra compensation, and gratuities add up to another eighty thousand. We've agreed to hand over the money this evening, which will allow him to be freed from his shackles."

"To be frank with you," said Mistress Wang, "my husband puts on a good show, but there's nothing behind the facade. He has a runner's job at the Customs, but it's a job in name only. He has always liked to go out and play around, leaving no money with his family, and now because of this sudden turn of events he's in trouble. Our son is still young. My husband's family has never been on good terms with him, and now they'll not only ignore him, they'll be sniggering at him behind his back. On my side of the family, there's no one capable of taking charge. When I heard the news yesterday, I was panic-stricken. I had nowhere to turn for help, I didn't know

what to do, and I spent the whole night in tears. Then before lunch today Fazi came back and told me that you had kindly put yourself out to help us. I at once sent the jewelry and clothes in the house to the pawnbroker's in return for a hundred thousand." She called to the maid to bring out the packets of money and put them on the table. "Here is a hundred thousand. Do take it. As for the balance, I've just now been talking to a cousin on my mother's side about a loan, and I would ask you to wait until tomorrow, if you'd be so kind as to come back again. I implore you, sir, to discuss this with the prison staff. It's vital that the shackles be removed today. As you know, my husband is slight and weak, and in addition he has an opium habit. He'll never survive such harsh treatment."

"Set your mind at rest, Sister-in-Law. One way or another, I'll get them to remove the shackles today so that he won't have to suffer another night of pain. It's important that you tell Fazi to take food, drink, and opium to the jail."

"I'll send him off at once. Thank you for handling these matters for us."

"Don't worry about it."

"There's one other thing I'd like to ask you. I've heard that this affair with my husband occurred because someone in a certain establishment tried unsuccessfully to get a loan from him and then conspired with other people against him. Do you know the details? Is there any way of getting him off?"

"You're quite right. Give me one more day, and I'll be able to tell you all the details. Now I must hurry off to settle that matter with the two departments so that he can be freed from his shackles. Tomorrow morning I'll go and see the clerk in charge of the case and ask him if there is anything he can suggest. After that, I'll come back and report to you."

Mistress Wang knelt down before him. "We're utterly dependent on your kindness! If by some chance you manage to get my husband off so that he can return home, I shall thank you most humbly again."

"Please get up, Sister-in-Law. I'd feel awkward returning your gesture. Your husband and I are very good friends, and you don't need to be so polite. I'll do the best I can." He picked up the money, took his leave, and left the house.

He went first to the money shop, where he had the money checked and rearranged into strings of nine hundred and twenty cash each,² then

wrapped the strings up in heavy paper. The rest of the money he put in his own purse.

At the yamen, he found Duan Qinggeng and Ge Ai standing in the gateway and arranged to meet them in a quiet place. "Here's seventy thousand," he said. "I'll be responsible for delivering the rest to you before lunch tomorrow. I hope that you'll release him from his shackles today."

"Just as you say." Yuan You then produced the packages of money and went with the other two to the money shop, where once more the clerk was asked to check the money.

"Master Yuan, why did you do them up in strings of nine hundred and twenty?" asked Duan Qinggeng as he accepted the money.

"There's nothing irregular about it. In big dealings at the Customs, they always use that method. In a small transaction like this, let's just say that we're in your debt."

"You're being too tough, sir. You're making things very difficult for us."

"I'm sorry if I've put you to any inconvenience. But nowadays there are plenty of prisoners in shackles. You may well catch a wild pig that will be the answer to all your prayers."

Duan Qinggeng and Ge Ai clucked in disapproval but gathered up the money anyway. "It's getting late," they said, "and the magistrate will soon close down for the day. It wouldn't be convenient to invite you in now. We'll hurry back and release Wu Zhen from his shackles. When you come to the prison tomorrow to visit your friend, you'll be pleased."

Yuan You bowed and thanked them, then asked which clerk was in charge of the case. "My colleague Bian Zhichi is handling it," said Duan Qinggeng. Yuan You asked where Bian lived and then took leave of them and went back and spent the night with Paria.

Early the next morning he went to Bian's house and invited him to a teahouse, where they drank tea and exchanged pleasantries. "You're handling my friend Wu Zhen's case," said Yuan You, "and I've come specially to beg you to find some way to save him. Naturally there will be a modest reward."

"Your friend was brought before the court yesterday. He testified that Bao Guang and other runners had listened to someone called Wu who had a grudge against him, and that the runners and this Wu had then banded

together to frame him. His Honor got so angry on hearing this that he ordered your friend to be given thirty blows to the face and held in prison. To be frank, Bao Guang and his men are in high favor at present, and the magistrate listens to them. Only if your friend has inside connections can he be acquitted. If you have no strings to pull, even if there really was a frame-up, the magistrate won't listen to you. If your friend continues to testify as he has done so far, he'll suffer no end of abuse."

"We're entirely dependent on your kind efforts. My friend has entrusted me with the contemptible sum of eight thousand cash for you and the copyist, in the hope that you will think of some way to save him."

"As the old saying goes, 'Beat, but don't imprison.' If your friend is hoping to walk away free and clear, that's impossible. You'll just have to tell him that when the case comes under review, he should testify that he used to smoke opium because of an illness, but after hearing of the strict ban, he had begun to cut down when, to his great surprise, he was investigated and arrested. If he testifies like that, he should be able to lessen the punishment he's subjected to. Generally, in cases like this in which someone is caught in the act, he can consider himself lucky to get off with a sentence of exile. Since you have asked me, I shall do my best to help, but I wouldn't presume to accept the very generous sum you offered." Yuan You realized the sum was too small and increased it to ten thousand, which Bian accepted.

"I wonder if I could also trouble you for the runners' charge with the comments attached, as well as the text of the court examination," said Yuan You.

"I'll have fair copies made and sent to you today." When the two men had eaten their breakfast, Yuan You paid the bill and arranged with Bian to meet at the same place the following day, when he would give him the money. Then the two men left the teahouse and went their separate ways.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

*Phoenix rents a house because of a ban on prostitution;
Jia Ming buys ginseng in order to stop smoking opium.*

After Yuan You and Clerk Bian had finished their discussion and parted company, Yuan went to the prison, where Fazi had already delivered the clothes and other items. At the sight of Yuan You, Wu Zhen jumped to his feet and knelt down in front of him: "Brother, thank you, thank you for everything!"

Yuan You quickly bowed in return: "Do get up! We're brothers, after all. There's no need for this sort of thing." He helped Wu Zhen to his feet and asked about the shackles, which had been removed the night before.

Ge Ai came to the office. "Well, Master Yuan, now that you've spoken to your friend, tell me, did we do the right thing?"

"You did indeed, thank you." Ge Ai withdrew, and Yuan You told Wu Zhen about his discussion with Clerk Bian.

Wu Zhen sighed. "All the enemies from my previous lives have come together in this one! But we can't escape our destinies. I'll just have to let fate take its course." Before leaving the prison, Yuan You tried at length to console him.

Fazi followed Yuan out and invited him to Wu Zhen's house, where once more he took a seat in the reception room, while Fazi went to the rear quarters and reported to Mistress Wang. She brought out a note for eighty thousand cash and gave it to Yuan, and he told her of his discussion with Bian Zhichi.

She began to sob. "With regard to the twenty-four thousand that you promised him, would it be all right if I raised a second loan today and sent Fazi over with the money tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow will do."

"There's one other thing I want to talk to you about. I'd like to visit the prison myself to see my husband. Would that be possible, do you think?"

"I've settled all of the prison expenses. If you wish to visit him, just go in with Fazi, and you won't have any trouble."

Yuan You took his leave of her and, after changing the note into fifty thousand cash in strings of nine hundred and twenty, gave the money to Duan Qinggeng and Ge Ai. The following morning he went back to the teahouse to meet Bian Zhichi. They greeted each other and, following a show of deference, took their seats and poured tea for themselves. After some idle conversation Yuan You gave Bian two notes, the gifts he had promised the day before for the clerk and his copyist, one of ten thousand, the other of two thousand, both in strings of nine hundred and twenty. After checking them, Bian put them away and produced a small white envelope with a plum-red slip attached to it that contained the copies and handed it to Yuan, who cast an eye over it and then put it away. After they had had their breakfast, Yuan You paid the bill, and they left the teahouse and went their separate ways.

At the prison Yuan You gave the copies to Wu Zhen, who studied them intently:

Petition from the runner Bao Guang:

Subject: Request to go to trial as result of search and arrest.

After receiving a special directive to work with the various local wardens in searching for and arresting people who smoke opium, I duly cooperated with them. I found that Wu Zhen, a runner for the Yangzhou Customs, put his trust in magical charms and was defying the law by smoking the proscribed substance. In cooperation with warden Fang Shang, I personally went to conduct a search and make an arrest. With my own eyes I saw Wu Zhen in the act of lighting an opium lamp and smoking. I arrested him together with one pipe, one opium lamp, and one packet of opium. I have now brought him and the paraphernalia to

the yamen. I hereby set forth the circumstances and earnestly request a merit award as well as an interrogation and response.

Respectfully submitted.

month day

Brought Wu Zhen before the court for interrogation. The said runners made a timely search and arrest, and naturally this office ought to reward them. But one cannot make a false arrest and stir up trouble; that would be a grievous mistake. The opium paraphernalia seized are to be stored in the treasury, and a receipt will be issued.

Wu Zhen testified: "I am thirty-three years old. I was previously employed as a runner for the Yangzhou Customs but was dismissed for neglect of duty. I have long suffered from a stagnation of the vital forces that frequently becomes acute, but I have found that when I smoke a small quantity of opium, my condition improves. Recently I heard that runners were making searches and arrests, so I didn't dare smoke anymore. When last month—I forget the exact date—I met the military licentiate Wu Jingyu, he tried to borrow several tens of thousands of cash from me, but I declined because I had no money. To my astonishment he bore a grudge against me and conspired with runners Bao Guang, Xiang Guang, Xu Guang, and others to bring opium paraphernalia and plant it on me in order to frame me. Wu Jingyu told me that if I could produce several hundred thousand cash I would be exonerated. I was unwilling to do so, and they brought me here to court. At the present time I truly do not smoke opium, and I ask as a great favor that Wu Jingyu be brought before the court for interrogation.

Finding of the court month day

Interrogation has established that Wu Zhen, relying on his position as a runner for the Yangzhou Customs, brazenly flouted the law and smoked opium in defiance of the ban. He was arrested together with his opium paraphernalia by runners and a warden. Under interrogation in court he was evasive and refused to confess. He tried to confuse the issue with baseless charges intended to implicate others and proved stubborn in the extreme. He is to be held in prison pending further examination and investigation. Examine and submit to higher authority. Remand in custody.

After reading the document, Wu Zhen said nothing, merely sighed again and again. "In my humble opinion," said Yuan You, "you need to get someone to appeal the case for you. If there's no one to do so, and you testify as you did when the case is reheard, it's Bian Zhichi's opinion that the magistrate will definitely not believe you, and he is afraid you won't be able to withstand the ill-treatment you'll be subjected to in prison. Before the verdict is issued, you need to confess that you used to smoke opium but testify that you've broken the habit. If you're lucky, you'll draw a sentence of exile."

"No matter what case is made, I'm afraid the magistrate will reject it. Not only do I have no one to step forward and appeal my case for me; even if I did, without money or influence it would be very hard to get the verdict overturned. In this situation, all I can do is accept my fate." After chatting for a while, Yuan You took his leave.

A few days later, word came that the case was to be reexamined. Yuan You again took care of the prison officials' gratuities on behalf of Wu Zhen, making a good deal of money for himself on the side. The magistrate ascended his tribunal and had Wu Zhen brought out for a reexamination, at which he testified as before. The magistrate roared at him and was about to have him struck in the mouth again, which so intimidated Wu Zhen that he felt that he had to change his testimony and do as Bian Zhichi had recommended. The magistrate pursued his questioning no further but ordered Wu Zhen to sign his confession in court and returned him to prison. Sentenced to exile, he was to wait in prison while the case was referred to higher authority, to the governor's office and to the Ministry of Justice, and a warrant was issued to escort him into exile. But these events lie in the future.

Let me return to Bao Guang and the other runners. They had brought Wu Zhen to the yamen and petitioned the magistrate, who had conducted his examination and remanded the accused in custody. Two days after that, Bao Guang, Xiang Guang, and Xu Guang sought out Yu Jiafu to collect the money they had been promised. Yu arranged with them that they should wait in the teahouse while he went to see Qiang Da, who took him to a secluded place in the house and lit an opium lamp for him.

"Let me ask your advice on something," said Qiang Da. "I would very much like to get Cassia to pay the whole forty thousand that we promised

them. If you will help with that, of course there'll be a present for you." Yu agreed to help.

Calling Cassia in, Yu Jiafu said, "Your share of that money we promised the runners the other day amounts to forty thousand, and they're coming for it today. Do you have it ready?"

Cassia was stunned, but she didn't dare ask for further details. Unfortunately for her, there was no way she could raise forty thousand at short notice. She had to get Sanzi to take some of her clothes and jewelry, and even the patterned coverlet from her bed and her chiming clock, to the pawnshop in order to raise twenty-four thousand, which she handed to Yu Jiafu. "Godfather, please take this as an initial installment. Give me three more days, and I'll find some way to get you the rest." At first Yu deliberately withheld his approval, but eventually he took the money. At the teahouse he gave it to the runners, promising to clear the rest of the debt within three days.

Hoping to get Wu Jingyu to borrow the balance for her, Cassia told Sanzi to invite him over. Wu Jingyu, however, after conspiring with the runners to arrest her patron, was too embarrassed to meet her. A few days after the event he had sought out the runners in order to collect his share of the money. Bao Guang had begun by blaming him. "You had a grudge against Wu Zhen, but you didn't attack him yourself; you used us as a cat's paw. You got us excited with your talk of a wonderful opportunity, but all we found was a fool with no money. Now we're burdened with the task of referring the case to higher authority at a cost of over a hundred thousand. Luckily we've got ourselves some side benefits, and we've made a bit of money at Qiang Da's. Yu Jiafu is also getting us something, but it's not even enough to take our colleagues to dinner. If it were not for our friendship, we'd hold you responsible for all this. But that you should actually want money from us—that's just plain stupid!" Wu Jingyu had argued his case again and again, until finally some of those present managed to scrape up a thousand cash for him. His was a case of ruining another without benefit to himself.

And so he was in a dejected mood when Sanzi came to say that Cassia wanted to talk to him. He had heard that she had pawned her clothes and jewelry and was still unable to cover the debt she owed the runners. Her sending for me must mean that she expects me to find some way of raising

the money, he thought. When I think of how many garments I've received from her, how much money and opium, how many nights I've spent with her free of charge, I did a terrible thing when I got her steady client arrested and involved her in paying off the runners. I've actually ruined that woman! But I have no money to help her out and no way of raising a loan. How can I possibly go and see her? "Tell Miss Cassia that I'll be along right away," he said to Sanzi.

Cassia waited for two days, but he still did not appear. As soon as her creditors heard that she had pawned her clothes and jewelry, they began pressing her for payment. The balance owed to the runners was due the next day, and she had no chance of borrowing it. She cried all night.

Early the following morning she asked Sanzi to take some odds and ends of hers to the pawnshop, raising over a thousand cash. She hurriedly washed and combed herself, then wrapped the pawnshop money in a linen kerchief, which she tied around her waist. To Qiang Da she said, "I'm going over to Wu Jingyu's to get him to borrow some money for me. I'll be back soon." Because she often went out, and also because she was not going very far, he did not send anyone with her.

Once outside, she walked along the base of the city wall and through the Great East Gate, leaving the city by Tianning Gate Street. Recalling what Wu Zhen had said in the Duke Shi Shrine, she walked along the moat through the gateway of the shrine in the Scripture Repository and continued on to the east. At the Bianyi Gate dock she came upon a boatman from Yancheng whom she happened to know, and he invited her on board and asked what she was doing there all alone. "I have a heap of debts," she said, "and my creditors are hounding me for money. There's nothing I can do about it, so I'm running away. I want to go home." She took the thousand cash from the kerchief around her waist and handed it to him. "If this isn't enough to take me back, I'll find the rest for you when we get to Yancheng." By a lucky chance, the boatman had finished loading his boat and was about to leave, and he was more than happy to do a good turn that would cost him nothing. Setting off at once, he took her back with him to Yancheng.

After lunch that same day Yu Jiafu arrived at Qiang Da's and asked him, "Has Cassia got together the balance that we owe the runners? There's also something I need to tell you. The prefect has put out a notice banning

prostitution. He's sending out a number of deputies to search for opium. Hurry up and get all the girls in the house to lie low and avoid the storm. Magpies don't have much in the way of brains. Don't let any trouble occur, or it may be too much for you to handle."

Qiang Da at once sent Sanzi over to Wu Jingyu's to fetch Cassia, then told Paria and Phoenix, who were in the house at the time: "There's another ban under way, and we'll have to close down for a while. I'll send Miss Lucky to her foster mother's. You two had better think where you want to hide out for the next few days."

Yuan You happened to be in Paria's room when she heard the news. "The house has to close down," she told him. "A few days ago I asked you to look into renting a place for us. Did you find anything?"

"There's an empty house on Old Lane with three *jian*¹ and two side rooms. The landlord is a friend of mine. You could move in there on a temporary basis, and then I'll put down a deposit and close the deal. I'll borrow some furniture, and you can live there."

"Hurry up and talk to him about it. I need to be out of here by tonight."

Sanzi returned and said to Qiang Da, "Wu Jingyu told me that Cassia never went to see him. I didn't believe him, and I searched through the whole house, but he was right; she wasn't there. I don't know where she could have gone." In a state of alarm, Qiang Da sent people out in all directions to search for her, but no trace of her could be found. He was forced to find some other way of raising the sixteen thousand, which he handed to Yu Jiafu to give the runners. Needless to say, Yu deducted a broker's commission.

Let me turn to Phoenix, who, after hearing Qiang Da say that he had to close down, was hesitating over where to go when Jia Ming happened to come in. He had no sooner sat down than she said, "You've arrived just at the right time. Master Yu came along today and said that the prefect has issued a ban on prostitution as well as opium. He told Qiang Da to close down for a few days. Qiang has sent Lucky to stay with her foster mother and told Paria and me to find somewhere to lie low for the time being. Master Yuan has found a house for Paria, and she's moving out this evening. That leaves me as the only one with nowhere to go. As I told you, my mother-in-law, husband, and brother-in-law are renting a tiny shanty with room for only one bed. If I go there, where am I going to sleep? As for

another brothel, well, all crows are black, so I suppose if our place is closing down, the others will have to close, too, so that's out of the question. I'm in a bind, and I'm worried about what to do. If only I'd known this earlier, there was an opportunity the other day that I could have taken."

"What opportunity was that? You never told me."

"I heard that someone from Shanghai had come to Yangzhou to hire girls and was willing to put up an advance of forty silver dollars. He wanted me to go, but I refused. Had I known about this, I'd have accepted."

"Why didn't you go? What a pity you couldn't see the advantages! You could have taken the forty dollars, given twenty to your mother-in-law and husband to live on, and used the other twenty to buy yourself some more clothes and baggage. You could have stayed awhile in Shanghai, where I expect conditions are a bit better than here, made a few taels, and then come back. Wouldn't that have been a good idea?"

"I did give it some thought, but there were several reasons why I couldn't go. First, you and I are lovers; we're never apart. How could I bear to leave you and go off somewhere else? Second, if I did well there, fine, but if I didn't, how could I pay back the forty dollar advance? It would amount to being *sold* to Shanghai! Besides, what about all those debts of mine? My creditors would never have let me go."

"Don't say you can't bear to leave me—that's pure blarney. Tell me, how much do you owe altogether?"

"All told, thirty or forty thousand."

"If you'd told me that you wanted to go to Shanghai, I could have called all your creditors together and taken over your debts, paying them off for you. That wouldn't have been a problem."

"I've put too much onto you already. How could I do it again? When I come to think of it, what a miserable life I've led from childhood on, with my mother dying young and my father marrying me to the Lan family as a child bride! At six my mother-in-law took me to Qingjiang and made me learn how to play and sing. I can't tell you how many curses and beatings I had to endure! At twelve I was forced to sleep with clients, and for years I had to earn my living in the brothel business, suffering untold misery. Only with the greatest difficulty did I manage this year to get back to Yangzhou. I'd rather beg for a living here than cast my bones away in some other place. Anyway, so much for that! In Yangzhou I have a loving

relationship with you. I can't rely on others, but I can rely on you. If I endure a few more years of misery and save up a few taels—and if you help me out—I'll buy a girl for that devil of a husband of mine, someone who'll work to support him. I'd be willing to join your household, even if I had to do the cooking—*anything*, no matter what. Even if it killed me, I'd die content. Surely I'm not condemned to this business *all* my life!" The tears streamed down her cheeks.

Jia Ming surmised from this speech that Phoenix really did wish to marry him, and he felt a quiet satisfaction. "A relative on my wife's side has a house of six *jian* and two side rooms on Ridge Street. It's vacant at present, and he doesn't have a tenant in mind. I'll go and talk to him and ask if I can skip the deposit and be responsible for paying the few thousand a month in rent. I'll also borrow some furniture from him. After that you can move in."

"Good for you!" said Phoenix. "Talk to him as soon as you can."

Jia Ming promptly went in search of his relative and explained that he would not be putting down a deposit but would pay four thousand a month in rent. He obtained the key to the house and also borrowed three tables. At the furniture store he chose a bamboo bed, a dressing table, six chairs, four stools, a tub, and a commode, then negotiated a price, agreeing to pay for the items at the next festival. He rushed back to Qiang Da's and told Phoenix what he had done.

She was delighted. She settled her account with Qiang Da and distributed some tips. A maid named Gao expressed a willingness to go, too, and Phoenix was happy to have her. She gathered up all the belongings in her room—scrolls, brass basins, lamp stands, teapot, and other items, then called for a sedan chair. She also called in porters to carry the baggage and the wickerwork chest and other items. Jia Ming led the way to the empty house on Ridge Street and used the key he had brought with him to open the locks on the front door. He paid the fare, and the porters carried the baggage into the house and piled it on the floor, then took their pay and left. Jia Ming borrowed a bench from a neighbor and told Phoenix to sit down. Calling Maid Gao to go with him, he went first to the furniture store and had the bed, tables, chairs, and so forth delivered to the empty house. Next he went to the relative's house and asked the man's servants to carry over the tables that he had borrowed. After that he bought pots, bowls and

the like and had Maid Gao take them back to the house. He called someone in off the street to sweep out the house, set up the bamboo bed, hang the bed curtain, and arrange the tables, chairs, and stools, while Maid Gao prepared the bed for Phoenix. Jia Ming had the man he had hired get change for a dollar and buy charcoal, rice, fish, pork, vegetables, seasonings, and so forth and prepare dinner for them. He paid the man two hundred cash.

He told Maid Gao to lock the doors and stayed there that night. Next morning he went to the agency and asked them to send him a manservant to cook and do odd jobs. Phoenix told her mother-in-law to leave the place where she was living and move in with her. She did so together with Phoenix's brother-in-law, Lan Da, but her husband, Lan Er, refused to move in and demanded two hundred cash a day from Phoenix to live in his own lodgings and support his opium habit. Although Phoenix had steady clients who visited her, she was in love with Jia Ming and unwilling to have the clients stay overnight. For days on end she persuaded Jia Ming to sleep there and was entirely dependent on him for all her expenses. The pair were inseparable, and she was happier than she had been at Qiang Da's as a split-fee courtesan.

In her spare time she made him a pillow. As Jia Ming took it in his hands, he noticed that it had a covering of crimson imported fabric that was embroidered with black silk thread and had a green hibiscus-style trim. Its white imported-crepe top had lettering in black characters: "Cheek to cheek, willing to follow the embroidery thread; heads together, wishing to dispatch the golden needle." Two seals in ancient script were embroidered on the sides in fine crimson floss silk; one said, "Perfect harmony," the other, "Presented by Phoenix." Jia Ming treasured the pillow, noting how perfectly the characters were embroidered and how skillful the strokes were. Later he took it home with him and put it safely away.

"There's something I need to say to you," he said. "I'm afraid you won't believe me, but if I don't speak up about it, we may find ourselves in serious trouble."

"Say it anyway. If I feel I ought to believe it, I will. Otherwise, I wouldn't believe it even if you said it twice over."

"Sitting at home here, you have no idea of what's going on outside. So far as opium is concerned, the runners and deputies of both counties have seized a great number of people, beating them, clapping them in cangues,

imprisoning them, and putting them on trial. They're searching everywhere. I was given a prescription for an antidote by a friend, and I lost no time in making it up into a paste. When I took it, it tasted just like opium, without any unpleasantness, and now I don't need to smoke anymore. But I'm worried about you. If you're arrested, what will we do? I can't get that thought out of my mind. But opium is the light of your life, and if I ask you to stop smoking, I know that you'll never agree."

"If you can stop, why can't I?"

"With your habit I should think you'd find it very hard."

"One only has to be passionate about it. Let's clap hands. We'll soon see whether I can stop or not."

"If you stop, I'll kill a chicken for you."

"Cut out the jokes and make up the paste."

From a paper folder Jia Ming drew out a prescription for an antidote. It read:

Finest quality Korean ginseng, 8 *qian*

Poria cocos, 1 ounce

Finest *Cortex cinnamomi*, 3 *qian*

Cortex eucommiae, 1 ounce

Cortex magnoliae officinalis, 5 *qian*

Radix dipsaci, 1 ounce

Shanxi Shangdang ginseng, 2 ounces, 2 *qian*

Inula flower, one 1-ounce silk packet

Huaishan medicine, 1 ounce

Golden chain fern, 7 *qian*

Lappula echinata, 7 *qian*

Licorice root, 7 *qian*

Huai *Radix achyranthis bidentatae*, 1 ounce

First decoct the above medicine and remove the sediment. Add five *qian* of opium ash and extract the juice, then add five ounces of brown sugar and five teaspoons of green ginger juice. Decoct until the mixture forms a paste. Before each craving, take a large teaspoonful of the paste mixed with boiled water. After three days gradually reduce the amount of paste, and you will no longer have the urge to smoke. Severe habits will require

a month to be completely eradicated, lesser ones only half a month. The cure works every time. On no account should it be regarded lightly.

Jia Ming read out the prescription, adding: "The only ingredients on the expensive side are the Korean ginseng and the *Cortex cinnamoni*. If I get them at the herbalist's, they'll cost a lot and won't be of the finest quality. Since you're sincere about giving up opium, I'll go to the Medical Materials Store on Huaajue Lane and buy some good Korean ginseng, *Cortex cinnamoni*, and *Cortex magnoliae officinalis*."

Before long he was back with the three ingredients. He told the manservant, Zhang Er, to take the prescription to the herbalist for the other ingredients and also to buy ten or more catties of top-quality charcoal, as well as brown sugar and green ginger. Jia Ming fanned the charcoal stove, put the ingredients in a large copper pot, decocted them several times with water, and then cleared out the sediment. He weighed out five *qian* of opium ash and put it in the pot to boil, then passed it through a bamboo strainer, retaining only the liquid, to which he added brown sugar and green ginger juice. After large amounts of charcoal had been used, and after a great deal of time had passed, he finally decocted it in the form of a paste, which he put in a covered bowl.

Whenever Jia Ming was in the house, Phoenix took the paste, but when he was out, she continued surreptitiously to smoke opium.

After Phoenix had moved out of Qiang Da's, Lucky took a small sedan chair to her foster mother's, and Yuan You came to tell Paria that the matter of the house had been settled and the furniture borrowed and installed. Paria paid what she owed Qiang Da and distributed tips. A maid named Wang wanted to go with her, and Paria consented. Maid Wang gathered up her belongings from her room, called a sedan chair, and took a seat in it together with Paria. Then, with porters carrying her baggage, they left Qiang Da's. Yuan You followed them to the house that he had found in Old Lane. He had already hired someone to sweep it out, set up the bed, and arrange the table and chairs. The porters brought in the baggage, which was duly checked by Maid Wang. After paying the bearers and porters, Yuan You told the man he had hired to go out and buy them firewood, rice, fish, pork, and so forth. When they had had their dinner,

he sent the man off. From that time on he spent every night in the house and never went home.

One day Paria's uncle arrived in Yangzhou and went first to Qiang Da's. He was directed to Old Lane, where he asked the way to Paria's house. Paria invited him to have dinner there and stay the night, but the following day he demanded sixty thousand cash from her for a full year's payment and said that if she didn't provide it he would take her home. She flew into a rage and quarreled with him.

If you are wondering what happened, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

*Sisters reunite with the gift of a gold hairpin,
And in-laws quarrel over the repair of a grave.*

Paria's uncle, Wang Eight,¹ had arrived in Yangzhou and quarreled with her. Suspecting her of living with someone, he had demanded an annual payment of sixty thousand cash; if it were not paid, he would take her home. "Don't you start suspecting that I'm living with someone and making a lot of money," said Paria. "The truth is that the prefect here banned prostitution, so Qiang Da had to close down, and I had nowhere to go. Master Yuan was kind enough to borrow this house from a friend of his and let me stay here for the time being. He's also helping out with some money to tide me over. In the few years I've been in Yangzhou I've piled up seventy or eighty taels in debt. I'll never be able to pay it off, but if you want to take me back and will agree to pay it off for me, I'll go with you. That way I won't have to reveal the miserable conditions in which I live."

Their quarrel went on for days, until Yuan managed to patch up an agreement by which he would pay one hundred silver dollars in return for a bill of sale giving Paria her freedom and severing relations with her uncle forever. Yuan took out the money he had made while acting for Wu Zhen, exchanged it for a hundred silver dollars, and gave them to the uncle, who signed the bill of sale and returned to Yancheng.

Paria threw herself wholeheartedly into her relationship with Yuan. She even brought out her own private savings and gave them to him so that he could supplement his income by lending them at interest. Choos-

ing an auspicious day, he invited Jia Ming, Wei Bi, Phoenix, and Lucky to a banquet. They knew that Paria was now married² to Yuan You and brought presents and spent the whole day at the Old Lane house, enjoying themselves thoroughly. Because Paria was now a married woman, Yuan You thought it wrong to continue to call her Mistress or Miss Paria, and since her childhood name was Sizi, he decided to call her Siniang.³ He also visited his parents and told them about the marriage. His father, Yuan Shou, was delighted at the news since Yuan You had no children by his wife, and he chose an auspicious day and sent a sedan chair for Paria. She paid her respects to him and his wife and gave them first-meeting presents. She also said to the maidservant, "Please ask the first lady to step out, so that I can pay my respects to her," but Mistress Du excused herself on the grounds of illness. Yuan You's parents invited Paria to extend her visit to a whole day, and it was not until after supper that she took a sedan chair back to her house.

From this point on Yuan You spent all of his time with Paria at Old Lane, treating his wife, Mistress Du, as a stranger. At festival time he would go home to see his parents and then come straight back. Paria now had someone she could depend on for the rest of her life. But let me leave her for a moment.

Any campaign initiated by a local yamen has the head of a lion and the tail of a snake. In the course of the ban on prostitution, each of the brothels laid out some money in bribes. Qiang Da's opened its doors again, and Lucky was taken back. Wei Bi, who had not lost his feeling for her, regularly spent his nights there. Phoenix, with a subsidy from Jia Ming, was able to get by in the house on Ridge Street. After some time the prohibition on opium was also relaxed, and both counties withdrew their warrants. Phoenix stopped taking the antidote and openly smoked opium. She never went to sleep before the fourth watch, but then slept until noon. Jia Ming was with her constantly, and whenever she lit the lamp to smoke, he would lie down opposite her. She would roast the opium, put it in the pipe, and hand it to him, saying, "Here, try this, just for fun!"

"I've given it up," he would reply. "I shouldn't start again." But he could not hold out forever against her daily agitation and mockery as she urged him to smoke. He tried it once or twice, and before long he was back to his old habit.

One day after lunch, Phoenix had just lit the lamp and was smoking beside him, when a woman in her early thirties came in. She was wearing a freshly starched but well-worn cotton gown and had with her a boy of twelve or thirteen. They came into the reception room, where Phoenix's mother-in-law, Mistress Dai, was sitting at the table playing patience. The woman saw her as she came in and cried out: "Madam, it's been *such* a long time since we met! Do you remember me?" She told the boy she had brought with her to call the lady "Ma'am."

Mistress Dai thought hard. "Are you the sister?"

"You're absolutely right!" said the woman with a smile.

Mistress Dai called out to Phoenix, "Daughter-in-Law! Your sister's here." Phoenix quickly got to her feet and came out from her room. One glance was enough to tell her that it was indeed her sister, who had married into the Lin family. Phoenix had been married as a child bride, and Mistress Dai had taken her to Qingjiang, which was why the two sisters had had no news of each other in over ten years. The two women clung to each other, sobbing. Phoenix invited her sister into her room and told Jia Ming about her. They greeted each other and sat down. Mistress Lin told the boy to call Phoenix auntie.

"How many children do you have?" asked Phoenix.

"Four, three boys and a girl. This is the youngest boy, who's twelve." They filled each other in on what had happened to them since they parted.

Jia Ming called to Zhang Er to prepare lunch, but Mistress Lin said, "We've already had lunch." Jia Ming sent someone out to buy pastries to offer the visitors.

He then got to his feet and said to Mistress Lin, "You'll have to excuse me, I'm afraid, but do stay and have dinner here."

"Where are you going?" asked Phoenix.

"I have a little business to see to. I'll be back once I've done it."

"Come back as soon as you can. Don't stop off anywhere else." He promised he would not, then took his leave of Mistress Lin and went off.

"How did you know I was back in Yangzhou and living at this address?" asked Phoenix.

"For several years after you went to Qingjiang, I used to ask people we knew who came from there, and so I still got news of you, but for the last few years I've had no news at all. Forgive me for saying this, but I really

thought we would never see each other again. Not a day has gone by that I didn't miss you. The other day I happened to be amusing myself standing in my doorway, when Mistress Wang, who used to be our neighbor—nowadays she makes shoes for all the houses—well, she told me that you had come back to Yangzhou and were living here, and that's how I found out. When my husband came home that evening, I told him, and he was delighted to hear you had returned and urged me to come and see you. So today I brought your nephew with me and asked the way here. But how have you been these last years? How is your husband? And have you been blessed with any children?"

Phoenix heaved a sigh. "What I've had to suffer would make a long story. I was six when my mother-in-law took me to Qingjiang to learn to sing and play music. I can't tell you how many curses and beatings I had to endure. At twelve they forced me to take clients, and I suffered a great deal of misery and humiliation. They ran a house in Qingjiang with a dozen or so girls, and at first business was quite good. But my husband and his brother whored and gambled and smoked opium, and they also slept around among the girls in the house, causing no end of trouble and getting involved in several nasty lawsuits. Their debts amounted to over a thousand strings, and the wretched place closed down. This spring they slipped away to Yangzhou and sent me to Qiang Da's on Ninth Lane. I took out a high-interest loan of ten thousand to buy some bedding, then worked there on a split-fee basis. I was lucky enough to meet this man Jia who was here just now, and he took care of everything for me. Later there was a campaign in town against prostitution and opium, and again it was Master Jia who found me a house, furnished it, and asked my mother-in-law and me to move in. My husband was too pigheaded to come. He's living alone in lodgings and every day, come rain or shine, he has to have his two hundred cash for opium, and that doesn't cover his clothes, shoes, socks, and so on, either. Fortunately, no children have appeared on the scene. Just to keep this place going, we need food, fuel, and minor items. I also need my opium. Master Jia has some every day, too. We roast an ounce of opium and have to make it last four days. All in all, including my husband's expenses, we need over a thousand cash a day just to get by. I'm often ill these days and can't take any clients. If I hadn't met this fellow Jia, I can't imagine what sort of state I'd be in. But I haven't seen you in years. How is your husband doing, by the way?"

"Don't talk about us! He did take the examinations. He went down to Taizhou several times, but without any success. Later my father-in-law died, and the funeral expenses left us with a good many debts. Because my husband was in mourning, he wasn't able to take the military exam. He's neither good nor bad, he has no business or profession, and he's steadily eating up our resources, frittering away all we have. We have the three boys and the girl, and we depend on my doing laundry and needlework for other people to make ends meet. The other day when I heard you were in Yangzhou, I was overjoyed and wished I could have flown straight over. First, because we haven't seen each other in many years and I wanted to talk to you, but second, because I wanted to consult you about the loan of a few taels to serve as capital for my husband so that he can start up in some kind of business. By rights, since this is our first meeting, I oughtn't to be saying these things, but I really have no choice."

"Look, we're sisters, and today we've been reunited. By rights, as your sister, I should be giving you money without your even asking for it. Unfortunately, I didn't return to Yangzhou after making my fortune—I sneaked back here after suffering a loss. If I hadn't met this fellow Jia in Yangzhou, I don't know what sort of state I'd be in. Now, even though I depend on him alone, he's not a rich man, and I have to scrape along. At present I have nothing over at all. Now, don't take this the wrong way, but I'd guess from the look of you that you're probably pinched for money." She plucked a gold *ruyi* ornament from her hair and pressed it into her sister's hand. "I'm not at all well off, but do take this and sell it. Put the money toward the capital your husband needs to start a business."

"When he has a bit of money over, he'll pay you back," said her sister.

"There's no need for that sort of talk between sisters. If only I could, I'd help you more. Why shouldn't I? By the way, where has that devil Chang-shanzi got to these days?"

"Don't talk about him! At one time he was working in Nanjing as a three-tail.⁴ Then three years ago he arrived in Yangzhou and stayed with us for ten days or more. The children all called him uncle, and when he left he gave them a hundred cash each. Since then I haven't heard a thing about him."

"Our parents had a hard life," said Phoenix, "and we children were scattered all over the place. I spent a dozen years away from Yangzhou, but

luckily I'm back now. I had hoped that the three of us could get together often. But we have no word of him; in fact we don't even know if he's still alive. If anything should happen to him, it would be the end of the family line. Since coming back to Yangzhou, I'd been unable to find out anything about either of you; I'm so happy to see you today. I've long meant to visit Father's and Mother's grave to pay my respects, but I keep forgetting. Now that you've found your way here, let's wait until you're free and then go there together."

"I'll come over early in the morning the day after tomorrow." She turned to her son: "And now my lad, I'm taking you home."

"Have dinner here before you go."

"It's not so easy walking the streets after dark. I'll come back and visit you some other time."

Phoenix gave the boy a hundred cash. "Your poor aunt! Here, take this and buy yourself some candy."

"*Thank* you, Auntie!" said the boy. Mistress Lin took leave of Phoenix and her mother-in-law and left with her son.

When Jia Ming returned that evening, Phoenix told him that her sister had asked her for a loan and that she had given her the gold *ruyi* to sell. He nodded and said nothing. "The day after tomorrow in the morning," she continued, "hire a rowboat for me and come with us to sacrifice at my parents' grave. I shall also need you to get a carton and buy some ingots."⁵

"I'll hire the boat," said Jia Ming, "but I have something I need to see to that day. Why don't you go on your own?"

"Oh, how wrong I was to suggest it! Master Jia's a great playboy, is Master Jia. How could he lower himself to sacrifice at *my* parents' grave?" Faced with her anger, Jia Ming consented to go with her.

The next day he bought a brown paper carton and filled it with ingots. Early in the morning of the day after he sent someone to the Taiping dock to hire a rowboat and bring it to the back door of Phoenix's house and wait there.⁶ Phoenix had risen at dawn, and soon after she finished her toilette, her sister and young nephew arrived and came to her room. Jia Ming and Phoenix greeted them and invited them to sit down, and Mistress Lin told her son to call Jia Ming uncle. Jia sent someone out to buy pastries, and after they had eaten, he and Phoenix each smoked a little opium, then packed the pipe and the lamp into a bag. Inviting Mistress Lin and her son

to join them, and with Maid Gao carrying the bags and the carton, they opened the back door and stepped into the boat. Jia Ming gave the order to set off. They went through the sluice at Tianning Gate and under the drawbridge at North Gate as far as Rainbow Bridge, where they stepped ashore and followed the little boy to the grave, which was at the back of the Jiang Garden. It was a single mound in a deplorable state of disrepair, and both Phoenix and her sister broke into loud sobs at the sight. Jia Ming told Maid Gao to put the carton down and go with the boy to the grave keeper's house and call him. The keeper, whose name was Pistol Tian, heard their shouts and hastened to gather touch paper and prayer cushions and then came to the grave with a shovel over his shoulder. After greeting everyone, he set down the prayer cushions and the touch paper and shoveled up enough earth to make a crown, which he heaped on top of the grave. Mistress Lin, Phoenix, and the boy all knelt down and kowtowed. Jia Ming also bowed, then told the boy to blow on the touch paper, which ignited the carton. The flames rose up, and in no time at all the carton and the ingots inside it had been consumed.

"How much would it cost to cover the grave properly?" Phoenix asked the grave keeper.

"A thousand."

"I can't offer you too little. Let's say five hundred." The keeper refused but accepted after Jia Ming added another hundred. He asked for Phoenix's address and said that once the work was done he would call on her to collect the money. Jia Ming gave him another seventy or eighty cash, and he took the money, picked up the cushions, and went off with his shovel over his shoulder.

Jia Ming led the group to the east side of Rainbow Bridge and into the Dexiongju restaurant, where he chose a large square table. It was just noon, and there were no other customers as yet. Jia Ming and Phoenix went to the room of the proprietress, Mistress Wang, where they lit the lamp, smoked some opium, and ordered the meal. When they had both satisfied their habit, they invited Mistress Lin and her son to join them for lunch. Afterward they went back to the proprietor's room and smoked some more, telling Maid Gao to sit down and have her lunch. As soon as she had finished, Jia Ming told her to gather up the opium paraphernalia and asked Mistress Wang to make out the bill. Then with the others he

went back and boarded the boat, and they visited Peach Blossom Temple, Little Gold Hill, and Fahai Temple. By the time they had had afternoon tea, it was getting dark, and they took the boat to the rear of Phoenix's house, knocked on the back door, and went in. Jia Ming paid for the boat, including a tip for the boatman, who then rowed his empty boat away. Phoenix asked her sister and nephew to stay for dinner, after which the visitors said good-bye and went home.

Several days later, Pistol Tian made his way to Phoenix's house and reported that the grave had been properly covered. She gave him the six hundred cash. He asked for and received a few dozen more as a tip, and then took himself off.

That evening Phoenix and Jia Ming were smoking opium in their room when they overheard Phoenix's mother-in-law, Mistress Dai, muttering to herself in the reception room, "My old fellow's grave is on Mount Wutai. For many years after we left Yangzhou, we never sacrificed there. Now this year we're back in Yangzhou, and I've said more than once how I'd like to wrap up some things and take a few hundred cash with me to the grave, but no one around here does anything *I* want. How was I to know there'd be money available today to visit *her* parents' grave and even put a cover on it? Parents are important, too, but anything I say goes in one ear and out the other."

She went on grumbling like this until Phoenix could stand it no longer and called out from the other room, "Look, you have two grown-up sons. Why don't you talk to them instead of grumbling at me? I sold the body my parents gave me to support your whole family, and even if I did have their grave covered, that's no crime. Moreover, I don't have many clients nowadays. If it wasn't for Master Jia running over here all the time—well, everything depends on him. When he comes here to enjoy himself, you can hardly expect him to concern himself with your family's living expenses, let alone with these matters! At your age, to come out with such nonsense!"

"If my son was any good, he'd be able to make some money to support his family instead of letting his wife sleep with other men. I don't object to your covering your parents' grave, but you should also spare a thought for the time when you joined our household. My old fellow loved you from when you were a child. Now that you have learned those skills of yours, you can make money yourself, but the past is clean forgotten. It's just that

when I heard you had covered your parents' grave, I began to think of my old fellow. His sons are no good, but when I say a few words that you're not expecting, you flare up. From now on I won't be able to open my mouth!"

Phoenix was going to continue the quarrel, but Jia Ming prevented her. Walking out of their room, he said to Mistress Dai, "Ma'am, you don't need to say any more—you're always complaining about your lack of money. If Miss Phoenix had any money to spare, she'd long ago have seen to it that sacrifices were made at *both* graves, without any distinction between them. There's no need to upset the harmony in the house. When I come tomorrow, I'll bring a few hundred cash with me, to allow you to sacrifice at your husband's grave."

"I shall do your bidding, sir, and say no more," said Mistress Dai.

Jia Ming went back and continued smoking opium in Phoenix's room, and after eating his supper he stayed with Phoenix that night. The next day at noon they suddenly heard an old woman come into the house and ask for Phoenix.

If you are wondering what she came for, you must turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Mistress Wang sells her daughter because of poverty;

Ailin tries to seduce her brother-in-law out of lust.

Jia Ming and Phoenix were smoking opium and chatting together when suddenly they heard an old woman outside asking for Phoenix. She came into the reception room, where Maid Gao asked her name, where she was from, and what business she had with the mistress. "My surname is Yang," she said, "and I used to live next door to your mistress. I heard today that she was back in Yangzhou, and I've come to pay her a visit."

From her room Phoenix heard a voice that sounded familiar. Pulling back the door curtain, she looked out and recognized Mistress Yang, a former neighbor who must now be in her sixties. She went out to welcome her. "Are you Mistress Yang?"

The old woman gazed at her for a moment before replying, "Can you be Miss He? Why, Madam, what a beauty you've grown into! If I'd seen you anywhere else, I wouldn't have recognized you." Phoenix led her into her room, where Mistress Yang saw Jia Ming and asked, "And is this gentleman your husband?"

"This is Master Jia. Now, no more questions. Take a seat!" Maid Gao offered tea and filled the pipe with tobacco. Phoenix and Mistress Yang chatted about all the things that had happened in the many years since they had last met. Phoenix sent someone out to buy pastries and also asked her to stay for lunch.

They spent a long time talking and then, when Mistress Yang learned that Phoenix had no children, she said, "Madam, my mother lives in the country, and she has a neighbor whose husband died and left her with four daughters. The three older ones were all married off as child brides, but she still has the youngest one with her. The girl is five years old and not at all bad looking, but her mother can't afford to keep her at home. She would like to have someone adopt her and is asking for just a few thousand. Madam, why not spend a few strings of cash and bring the girl into your household as security?¹ Before long you're bound to have a fine little boy of your own, and then I'll come over for a dish of eggs."

A feeling of excitement came over Phoenix. "Yes, do speak to Mistress Wang about it. Bring the girl over any day you please. If she's really not bad looking, I'll take her."

"I'll see to it," said Mistress Yang as she took her leave. "Thank you, Madam."

"Did I hear you say you were going to buy a child?" asked Jia Ming. "If this woman brings you one and you like the look of her, don't, whatever you do, let on that you're buying her for yourself; just say you're buying her for some stranger. People like you oughtn't to spend their money raising children for others. After some time, just as the child is beginning to have some prospects, her birth parents will come storming in and claim her back again. I've seen it happen ever so many times!"

"I know that," said Phoenix.

A few days later, Mistress Yang came back, accompanied by a village woman in her forties wearing ragged clothes and holding a girl of four or five by the hand.

Mistress Yang went into Phoenix's room and whispered to her, "Madam, it's about that matter we discussed the other day. The girl and her mother are here. Come out and see them."

Phoenix took Jia Ming by the hand and led him out of the room. In the reception room they found a village woman with unbound feet. Beside her was a little girl without a trace of smallpox. She looked captivating—hollow-eyed, with long eyelashes and a pinched little face, probably because the meals at home were none too regular. When the woman saw them come out, she got to her feet and addressed them as "Sir" and "Madam."

"Please sit down," said Phoenix. To the child she said, "How old are you?"

"Five," said the girl.

"What's your baby name?"

"Rota."

"Have you had the smallpox, Rota?"

The woman answered for her. "She had it at the age of two. Thanks to the bodhisattva, it was only a short-term rash."

Phoenix was delighted with the little girl. She went into her room and fetched some fruit for her. She also sent someone out to buy pastries for them all. When they had finished, Mistress Yang said, "Well, Madam, now that you've seen her, do you fancy her?"

"She'll do well enough. I'm not buying her for myself, you understand, but for a stranger from out of town who has asked me to act for him. Adoption will mean cutting off all contact with her mother. I'm wondering how much she would want?"

"She told me she would want eight thousand cash for a complete separation with the agreement recorded in writing."

"I'll give her four thousand," said Phoenix.

Mistress Yang put it to the woman, who thought the offer too low. Mistress Yang tried again and again to work out a compromise. At length she advised Phoenix to offer six thousand, which the woman accepted. A scribe was called in from the street to draw up a bill of sale, which read as follows:

The undersigned, Mistress Zhang of the Wang family, hereby enters into an agreement to sell her daughter. Her husband is dead and she has no sons or relatives but is left with a daughter whose childhood name is Rota. She is five years old at the present time and was born in the *mao* hour of the fourth day of the fourth month. Because of famine, the family is poor and the mother is unable to support the girl. She is now willing through the mediation of a neighbor to sign an agreement selling the girl to a stranger from other parts. She is to receive six thousand cash in strings of nine hundred and eighty. After the sale, she will sever all relations with the girl. If something untoward should occur, each will submit to heaven's will. The purchaser will take the girl home and raise

her, and later, when she has grown up, he will be allowed to make her his daughter or maid or concubine or the wife of some other man chosen by him, all of this without interference from Mistress Zhang.

The girl is not engaged to marry anyone, nor has there been any prenatal marriage arrangement, nor has she been already adopted either by members of her family or anyone else. Should there be any relatives or others who dispute this statement, that will be the concern of the undersigned, not of the purchaser. As proof, I hereby make this contract to sell my daughter. Let it stand as permanent evidence.

The scribe wrote the date on the back of the document and handed it to Jia Ming, who read it and then watched as Mistress Zhang with tears in her eyes attached her thumbprint. Mistress Yang, whose name was listed as mediator, signed with a cross and gave the bill of sale to Phoenix to put away. Next Phoenix paid the six thousand cash to Mistress Yang, who passed it on to Mistress Zhang. She wrapped the packet of money in a tattered blue cloth apron and slung it over her shoulder. Then, with tears in her eyes, she looked at the little girl and said, "Rota, dearie, you play in here while I go out to the street and buy you some fruit." The little girl would not let her mother leave but clung, sobbing, to the hem of her clothes. Her mother steeled herself, pushed the child away, and went off with the money over her shoulder. Phoenix invited Mistress Yang to stay for lunch and gave her a thousand cash as a token of gratitude.

When the little girl saw her mother leaving, she sobbed even more loudly than before. Phoenix led her into her room, where she gave her fruit and cookies and tried in a hundred different ways to soothe her, and eventually she did stop crying. Phoenix had the child's hair combed and dressed, her braids tied with a red ribbon, and her face washed and powdered. She also ordered the dressmaker to make new clothes for her from head to toe. After the little girl had changed into the new clothes, the ragged ones were put away. Phoenix also told Maid Gao to make her new shoes and stockings.

Jia Ming gave her a new name, Orchid, and from then on the whole household called her Orchid. After a few days, she grew accustomed to her new surroundings and did not cry anymore. At night she slept with Maid Gao. Whenever Jia Ming had nothing to do in the evenings, he would cut

red paper into squares and write characters on them for Orchid to memorize, then teach them to her once or twice. She turned out to be naturally intelligent, able to memorize ten to twenty characters a day, and, when tested the following day, to remember every one. For this reason Jia Ming and Phoenix doted on the child.

One day Mistress Lin came to give Phoenix a pair of shoes that she had made. On arriving in the house, she noticed Orchid and asked Phoenix about her. Phoenix told Orchid to call the lady auntie and explained the child's presence. She urged her sister to make the girl a pair of cloth shoes to wear when her feet were bound, and as she left, Phoenix passed her several hundred cash behind Mistress Dai's back. (After her sister became a regular visitor, Phoenix always helped her out with gifts of money, large or small.) When the sister had finished the shoes for Orchid, she brought them over, and Jia Ming took up the calendar and chose an auspicious day for the foot-binding.

Since the sister was such a frequent visitor, Mistress Dai knew that Phoenix must be giving her money, and she often picked a quarrel with her daughter-in-law. But these are trivial matters, about which I cannot go into detail.

One afternoon a sedan chair arrived in the lane, followed by a porter carrying baggage, and the bearers asked the way to Phoenix's house. A woman in her twenties stepped out of the chair and went inside to the reception room, while the porter brought in the baggage and Maid Gao hurried to Phoenix's room to report the arrival. When Phoenix came out, she recognized her sister-in-law. Ailin had worked in the Qingjiang brothel, and now, because Phoenix and her family had left for Yangzhou, she, too, had caught a boat for Yangzhou and taken a sedan chair from the Bianyi Gate dock.

The two women greeted each other, and Phoenix invited Ailin into her room, where she saw Jia Ming and asked, "Who is the gentleman?"

"This is your brother-in-law Jia."

Ailin greeted Jia Ming and took a seat. Phoenix paid the bearers and porter, and told Maid Gao to check the baggage that the porter had brought. Mistress Dai came in, having heard Ailin's arrival from her room, and mother and daughter began telling each other all that had happened since they parted. Then, after talking for a while, Mistress Dai went out again.

Jia Ming noted that Ailin seemed to be about the same age as Phoenix but was not as attractive—she had a dark complexion and her feet were a good deal larger. Phoenix invited her to lie down on the bed opposite Jia Ming and satisfy her opium habit. She also told Maid Gao to clean the room across the way and carry Ailin's baggage into it, putting up a bed curtain so that Ailin could sleep there.

One afternoon several days later, Phoenix was in the reception room talking to Mistress Dai. Jia Ming had lit the opium lamp and was smoking in Phoenix's room when Ailin came in. "Come and have a smoke," said Jia Ming.

"You go on smoking, Brother-in-Law." She approached the bed, but instead of lying down in the empty space opposite Jia Ming, she lay on top of him, pressing her cheek against his. Jia Ming was holding the pipe with a pellet of opium in it, but she snatched the pipe away from him and stuck it in her own mouth and proceeded to smoke in front of the lamp.

"If you want to smoke, go and lie down opposite," said Jia Ming. "If you lie on top of me and a certain green-eyed person comes in, she'll resent it."

"She doesn't *own* you, you know! Why can't we make up to you, too? I don't know how many good clients of mine she lured away from me in Qingjiang, and I never said a word. We're on the best of terms, she and I. So long as you show some gumption, she can't afford to be jealous." As she said this, she began kneading his legs, and Jia Ming, who was ticklish, wriggled here and there trying to escape her. Locked together, they rolled about on the bed.

At first, when she saw Ailin going into her room, Phoenix thought nothing of it, but when she heard giggling coming from the room, her suspicions were aroused and, without saying anything to Mistress Dai, she pulled aside the door curtain and marched in. At the sight of Ailin on top of Jia Ming, she was overcome by rage. "My dear," she said to Ailin, "you needn't be so furtive about it. Let me be your matchmaker."

For a moment Ailin thought she was serious and gave a slight smile, but Phoenix marched up to the bed and, pushing Ailin aside, straddled Jia Ming herself and seized him by the ear. "A thieving tomcat never changes its ways! When you used to whore about in other places, I spoke to you about it, and you swore to my face that with me you'd cut out all the lies

and excuses. Today I've caught you red-handed and you can't lie your way out of it. Since you two want each other, I won't play the spoiler. You and I can part just as easily as we came together. Find yourself some other place at once and take her there. Well, that's that, but you did betray the trust that I placed in you. For your sake I've had countless squabbles with my mother-in-law and husband. To give just one example, whenever I had my period² and kept you with me overnight, they had all sorts of nasty things to say. When you weren't here, I had quarrel after quarrel that I never let on about because I was trying to please you. I didn't realize that all the things you said to me were false. You deceived me into believing they were true, and I gave my other clients the cold shoulder and fawned over you. I was really hoping we would be together for life, but you go and fall for anyone who takes your fancy!" She sobbed as she said this, then butted her head wildly against his and rolled about from side to side, raging and ranting without a pause. Again and again Jia Ming attempted to explain, but she refused to believe a word he said.

Upset by Phoenix's reaction, Ailin fled into her mother's room, where she gave a one-sided version of what had just happened. Mistress Dai leapt to her daughter's defense, rushed into the reception room, and began enumerating Phoenix's various misdeeds: she had slandered Ailin, she couldn't stand her living there—a string of wild charges. This drove Phoenix into an even worse state of depression, and she sobbed and raged for two whole days. Jia Ming swore vow after vow, consoling and accommodating her in every conceivable way, and her anger gradually subsided.

Ailin now felt distinctly ill at ease in the house, and she spoke to her mother about accompanying her to Suzhou, where she planned to resume her trade. Mistress Dai then had another row with Phoenix as she demanded their travel expenses. Only after Jia Ming had put up several thousand cash for their travel—and also covertly sent Ailin a few ounces of opium—did the women finally set off.

If you are wondering what happened after that, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

*An anxious Phoenix nurses an invalid,
And an appreciative Jia Ming offers poems.*

Now that Mistress Dai had departed for Suzhou with Ailin, Phoenix felt as if a pair of thorns had been removed from her side, and at last she knew some peace. Jia Ming continued to spend most of his nights with her.

On the first anniversary of the death of Jia Ming's father, priests were invited to the family house to hold a service for the soul of the deceased. There would be music, sacrifices of food for hungry ghosts,¹ and bright lights. When Phoenix heard about it, she insisted on attending the service for her own pleasure, and Jia Ming did not like to prevent her. At dawn on the day of the service she rose, washed, and dressed, changing into new clothes, then called a sedan chair and, with Orchid beside her and Maid Gao in attendance, arrived with her presents all prepared at the gate of the Jia household. Stepping out of the chair, she took Orchid's hand and walked in, to be received by Jia Ming and his wife, Mistress Li. First she knelt before the portrait of the deceased, then paid her respects to Mistress Li and told Orchid she should address her as godmother. Mistress Li consented and invited Phoenix to go in and take a seat, while a maid offered her tea and tobacco. Maid Gao handed over the presents, which Jia Ming received, then paid the bearers' fee and other tips. He had four dishes of pastries set out and offered them to Phoenix and Orchid. Mistress Li knew that Phoenix smoked opium and she had her maid light the lamp in her room and invited Phoenix to satisfy her habit there. The two women exchanged some polite

conversation. As an experienced courtesan, Phoenix of course knew how to ingratiate herself, and Mistress Li took a strong liking to her. After enjoying herself there all day, Phoenix stayed until evening to watch the priests they had engaged for the service extinguish the lanterns, race about in the five directions, and burn the colored banners, all of which she found exciting. She watched also as they bowed low before the altar. When they stepped onto the terrace, she was about to take her leave, but Mistress Li insisted that she stay the night. In the end, Phoenix enjoyed herself there for several days before returning home. As she was leaving, Mistress Li brought out an embroidered purse containing a small silver ingot weighing three *qian* and gave it to Orchid. She had a servant buy four packages of cakes, lit several sticks of benzoin, called a sedan chair, and sent Phoenix home. From then on, whenever Phoenix had spare time, she would pay a visit to Mistress Li. They exchanged seasonal gifts and developed a close friendship.

One day Phoenix was sitting at home when a man in his thirties walked in. It was her brother, whose childhood name was Changshanzi. He had come back from Anhui province, and his sister, Mistress Lin, had sent her son to show him the way to Phoenix's house. For both brother and sister, meeting again after a long separation, the joy was mixed with sadness. Phoenix had him stay in the house, saw to his food and drink, and gave him money for incidental expenses, including the barber and the bath-house. After many years away from Yangzhou, she rejoiced in being reunited with her own flesh and blood.

But at the height of joy, sorrow is born. Jia Ming suddenly developed erysipelas on one of his feet and took to his bed, unable to walk. Phoenix was alarmed, and early every morning she went over to the house to visit him. There she personally prepared his medicine, heated the water, and bathed his foot, then rubbed ointment on both feet, undeterred by the filthy matter. Mistress Li, who was on good terms with her, was perfectly content to yield when it came to preparing medicine and applying ointment, and Phoenix threw herself into the task of attending on Jia and proved far more assiduous than his wife. She went there early and came home late and was on tenterhooks the whole day lest Orchid's playing in the house might irritate him. After ten days or more, his condition began to improve, but only when he was convalescing at home did she cease worrying and give up her daily visits.

A few days later his foot had completely healed, and he could walk again. One day after lunch he walked slowly over to see her. Zhang Er,² Maid Gao, and Changshanzi saw him coming and went forward to welcome him and ask about his health. As for Phoenix, she was beside herself with joy—it was as if a miracle had occurred. Taking his hand, she led him into her room, where Maid Gao followed with tea and tobacco.

“Congratulations on your recovery!” she said. “Have you had anything to eat?”

“Thanks to you, I’m completely better, and I’m ever so grateful. I had some lunch just now. I haven’t been out of the house in over half a month, and I became terribly bored, so I strolled over here to have a chat with you and cheer myself up.”

“Perhaps you’re hungry? Shall I get you something to eat? You’ve just come through a crisis, and you mustn’t go hungry.”

“I’ve only just eaten, and I’m still full. Let’s wait a while.” Phoenix called on Maid Gao to light the lamp so that Jia Ming could smoke.

“While I was suffering with my foot, you were kind enough to visit me many times. You prepared the medicine and applied the ointment, and you weren’t put off by all the filth. You were so attentive, and I feel sorry that I caused you such trouble. While I was recuperating at home with nothing to occupy my time, I wrote a pair of scrolls and six poems that I’d like to offer you.” He drew from his sleeve a pair of scrolls mounted on apple green wax paper, as well as several sheets of pink paper flecked with gold. He spread out the scrolls, which read:

The phoenix alights only in the finest places;
The performer constantly sings the most loving songs.

The first attribution read: “For the Perusal of Phoenix the Divine Lady.” The second read: “Presented by the Exceedingly Foolish Student.”

Jia Ming also set out the sheets, all of which were written in cursive script.

In the second month of spring in the *dingyou* year, my friends invited me to join them at the Scent of Bamboo house, where I first set eyes on Miss Phoenix. I took note of her elegance and grace, her sweet nature, her spar-

ing use of makeup, and her cloth dress and silver jewelry; she was dressed like a girl of good family and had none of the vulgar brothel manner. And then at the banquet I heard her wonderful singing and dancing, which quite ravished my senses. We conversed for a long time, and she favored me with a heart-to-heart exchange, after which we became close friends. For two years we were constantly together, almost without missing a day. Then in the first month of autumn of the *yihai* year, I happened to be confined to bed because of an infected foot, and Miss Phoenix took the time to attend on me every day, personally preparing the medicine, and washing and applying ointment to the infected part, undeterred by either the filthy matter or the hard work. I have now had the good fortune to make a complete recovery. While recuperating at home I had nothing to occupy my time, so in a playful mood I composed these six poems for her, in the hope that she would read and correct them.

POEM 1

Although for years I feared to fall in love,
 With her I had no choice, try as I might.
 The bond that we share must be foreordained;
 How could it be merely love at first sight?

POEM 2

An orphan child with none to cherish you,
(She lost both parents while still a child)
 Taken from Yangzhou for many a long year.
(She was born in Yangzhou but was taken to Qingjiang by her mother-in-law and spent many years there before returning.)
 If we had but met each other before,
 You would not as a child have dressed your hair.³

POEM 3

Pear-blossom cheeks, waist like a willow frond,
 As she trips with tiny steps, her garments sway.

But then, when flushed with wine, she turns all shy—
Her drunken look quite takes your breath away.

POEM 4

I've seen you knit your brows all day, poor love,
And at your dressing table stream with tears.
What was the reason for the gloomy silence?
Because at home you were beset by fears.

POEM 5

By falling ill I gave you endless trouble;
On nine days in ten you came to nurse me.
I own I have been heartless up to now;
What made you care for me to this degree?

POEM 6

I have no bower to receive you in;
My response to your love has been remiss.
But if our hearts are truly loving now,
Let's live out our next lives in married bliss.

“When I heard that you were suffering with your foot,” said Phoenix, “I was scared out of my wits. I went to visit you every day, but I was still worried when I got home in the evening. I burned ever so many sticks of incense and made ever so many promises in my prayers! And I was never able to calm down enough to sleep at night. Now, thanks to heaven, you’ve completely recovered from your ordeal. One day I shall hold a great service and repay all the promises I made in my prayers so as to protect you from disaster in the future. I’m most grateful to you for favoring me with the poems and the scrolls, but unfortunately I can’t read, so please read them out to me.” Jia Ming asked someone to hang the scrolls up on the wall, then read the couplet and the six poems out loud and explained them one by one to Phoenix.

She was delighted with them. "As soon as you can, please have them sent to the art shop for mounting. I want to hang them up in my room," she said. "Later on you can teach me to memorize them line by line, so that when I have some free time I can cheer myself up by quoting them. Although I know nothing about literature, when I heard you say the line that goes 'Let's live out our next lives in married bliss,' I felt I just couldn't wait for the next life. If you really do love me, why not put up the cost of a woman who could earn a living for my husband and take me home with you? Wouldn't that be married bliss in *this* life? Why do we need that depressing reference to the next life?"

"I was recuperating at home and had nothing to occupy me, so I concocted these few lines of doggerel⁴ to cheer myself up. You can't mount them as *poetry*! If anyone saw them, he'd laugh his head off."

"Myself, I wouldn't know whether they're good or bad. I just enjoyed hearing them when you read them out together. Please have them mounted, for my sake."

"If you insist that I make a fool of myself, I'll take them to the shop and bring them back once they're mounted so that you can hang them up and enjoy yourself—and make me into a laughingstock."

"If they're hanging up in my room, who's going to see them and make fun of you?"

Jia Ming called Orchid in and said, "I haven't been here in ten days or more, and I expect you've forgotten all the characters you learned. Take a look at the characters on those scrolls. How many do you recognize?"

Orchid looked closely at the scrolls. She remembered all of the characters she had been taught, which included seven or eight of those on the scrolls, and Jia Ming was more than pleased with her. "I thought that with no one here to test you every day, you'd probably have forgotten all the characters, but you didn't forget a single one. You're so smart, it's a pity you're a girl." He found a few dozen cash in his pocket and gave them to her. "Here, take this and buy yourself some fruit. I'm pleased with you because you worked hard at learning your characters." Orchid took the money and went gleefully off to play in the reception room. Jia Ming smoked a little, and Phoenix sent out for pastries for their afternoon tea. That evening Jia Ming had dinner there and stayed the night.

A few days later Mistress Dai returned from Suzhou. She stepped out

of the sedan chair, came inside, and began a steady moaning and groaning. Phoenix came out of her room and asked, "Ma'am, why are you in such a state?"

"I took Ailin to Suzhou, and she went to work at the House of Great Joy on Cabin Lane inside Xu Gate. The only reason I came back to Yangzhou is that I got sick!" Phoenix paid the boat fare for her as well as the cost of the sedan chair bearers and the porter, and also called in a doctor to check her pulse. Her illness proved to be nothing more than a stasis of the blood brought on by a chill, but she had to be treated with medicine for more than a month before she was completely cured.

Time flew by, and soon it was the end of the year. All of the New Year expenses were borne by Jia Ming. On New Year's Eve, he provided the gift money, in graded amounts, for Phoenix's entire household. In the evening, he and Phoenix drank to see the old year out, and he cleared up all the business that had to do with the house. Not until the fourth watch did he go home and celebrate the new year. On the afternoon of New Year's Day itself, he went back to Phoenix's house. When they saw him coming, Maid Gao and Zhang Er set off fireworks and offered him compliments of the season. Then, when he came inside, Mistress Dai, her eldest son Lan Da, and Changsanzi all offered him their compliments. In Phoenix's room he found a blazing charcoal fire and on the table a pair of tall wax candles glowing. Phoenix greeted him, and they exchanged compliments. Orchid was called in, and she kowtowed before Jia Ming and offered him her compliments. Maid Gao brought in ingot tea with brown sugar and set a hamper on the table. Phoenix took New Year cakes, dried longan, dates, peanuts, and melon seeds from the hamper and offered them to Jia Ming together with a number of New Year's prints bearing good wishes, such as "Wisdom and distinction," "A sweet and happy life," "Prosperity," "May you soon have a son," "May you live to a ripe old age," "May you have numerous descendants." Jia Ming ate a New Year date, then took out several pink paper notes and gave one each to Mistress Dai, Lan Da, Changshanzi, Maid Gao, and Zhang Er. He also handed Phoenix a note for her husband, Lan Er, and gave Phoenix herself a silver dollar. To Orchid he gave a note to buy fruit with. Phoenix called in Maid Gao to light the opium lamp and invited Jia Ming to smoke. Dinner that night consisted of twelve dishes and a pot of wine, and after he and Phoenix had enjoyed their meal, he stayed the night.

On the thirteenth, which was the day lanterns were put up, Jia Ming went to the Yuan Gate Bridge and bought a pomegranate-style nest of lanterns as well as four crickets and several carousels,⁵ which he hung in Phoenix's room. He also bought a mandarin fish lantern for Orchid to light and amuse herself with. On the evening of the fifteenth he bought two boxes of fireworks and various kinds of crackers—meteors, nine-tailed dragons, weeping willows, threaded peonies, gold and silver candleholders, flying fish, brighter-than-the-moons, plus several buckets of squibs. He drank wine with Phoenix as the Lantern Festival was celebrated. On the eighteenth they had a meal of noodles together and took down the lanterns.

In the middle of the second month Jia Ming's eyes suddenly began to hurt. He thought it was merely conjunctivitis and paid no attention, but after five or six days both eyes had swollen up like peaches, and it was hard for him to open and close them. A doctor examined him, and Jia Ming took medicines and used ointments. He even underwent a special bathing treatment combined with massage, but nothing worked. The pain increased until it began to affect his intestines, and he took very little food or drink but lay on Phoenix's bed and moaned day and night. She was so alarmed that she stayed at his side until the middle of the night, then got up, rinsed her mouth out with cold water, and began licking the pus and blood from his eyelids with the tip of her tongue. She kept on licking until almost day-break, when Jia Ming felt that the pain had eased a little, and he closed his eyes and dozed. She did this for three nights in succession before the pain ceased and the swelling went down.

"My eyes hurt so badly, and there was so much pus that it gummed them both up. Even my own wife couldn't have licked them for me. Luckily for me you weren't put off by all the muck, and you licked my eyes for several nights until they got better. The love you showed me is etched on my heart, and I shall never forget it."

"So long as you're in good health and spirits, and we enjoy a lasting friendship, I'll die content," she replied. "No one is asking you to get all emotional over it." After a few days Jia Ming's eyes were completely better, and he was able to walk outside again.

Time flew by, and soon it was the Pure Brightness Festival. Several days before, Phoenix had asked Jia Ming to hire a boat and invite Mistress Lin and her children as well as Changshanzi to go with them to sweep their

parents' graves.⁶ On the day of the festival, Jia Ming, Phoenix, and Orchid paid a visit to the City God Temple. When the tree peonies and the herbaceous peonies were in full bloom, Phoenix also asked Jia Ming to hire a boat to go and enjoy them. And at the Upright Sun Festival,⁷ Jia Ming hired a pleasure craft and took Phoenix to see the dragon boats. Theirs was a harmonious relationship, and they were inseparable.

One day as they were lying down opposite each other on her bed smoking opium, they heard a visitor saying something to Maid Gao.

If you are wondering who the visitor was and why he came there, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

*Phoenix breaks her vows and marries another man;
Lucky takes her lover's money and returns home.*

Phoenix had been smoking opium in her room with Jia Ming when they heard someone in the reception room. Maid Gao asked who he was and why he had come. "My name is Ge Ren," he replied, "and I'm manager of the Lüxing Garden Guesthouse on Ridge Street. Yesterday a gentleman from Shandong surnamed Lu arrived at the guesthouse. His father used to be a grand secretary, and he himself is an official in one of the ministries and wears a crystal button on his cap.¹ He has brought a large retinue with him and has rented a whole separate courtyard of the guesthouse. Today he told me to fetch a courtesan who can sing and play for him. I've heard that your Miss Phoenix is an accomplished singer and musician, and I've brought her an invitation."

"Our Miss Phoenix has already been retained by someone. She doesn't go out on assignments anymore. You should try somewhere else."

"But I came especially on her account, and I'd appreciate your having a word with her. I'll wait here to see if she's coming."

Maid Gao went to Phoenix's room and told her what the visitor had said. "Ever since I moved here," said Phoenix, "I've never been out on an assignment. You shouldn't have brought this to me. I shan't go. Send him away."

Maid Gao was about to leave the room when Jia Ming called on her to wait. Turning to Phoenix, he said, "You don't have anything to do at home,

anyway. When there's a traveler of this sort passing through, why not go over there and make a little money? You could buy a few ounces of opium for us to roast, which would be all to the good."

"It's not that I'm unwilling to go. But you're here, and if I did go, you'd be left on your own. That's why I turned him down."

"Let's dispense with the blarney. Maid Gao, go and ask him how much he would pay for the assignment."

The maid went back to the reception room and asked Ge Ren. "How much did that man Lu say that he would pay for the assignment?"

"I explained to him that it would be a five-tael assignment. However, my own gratuity can't be set at the standard rate. I would expect to benefit handsomely from the occasion."

Maid Gao reported this to Phoenix and Jia Ming, but Phoenix still wavered. Jia Ming said to Maid Gao, "Tell him he can go back now and say that the courtesan will be along as soon as she's ready." Maid Gao sent Ge Ren off.

Phoenix satisfied her opium habit, then washed and combed again, changed her clothes, and told Jia Ming not to go home but to wait there for her return. Then she stepped into a sedan chair. Zhang Er carried her lute case, and she also called in an opera musician to accompany her to the Lüxing Garden.

She returned at the third watch and, after paying the fare, remarked to Jia Ming, "That Master Lu's father really was a grand secretary, and he himself is the assistant director of a ministry. He has several concubines, who have given him several sons. His eldest son's mother was a concubine. The son succeeded in the examinations and has been appointed to the Hanlin Academy. After he passed the licentiate exam, his mother was sent away for some reason by Master Lu and married off to a tailor. Now Master Lu has come down from Beijing to visit Qingjiang, Yangzhou, Suzhou, and Hangzhou. He's looking up his father's protégés and friends in order to raise money for himself.² He's very fond of wine, but he won't touch opium. We had a long talk, he and I, and he asked me to sing a suite from an opera as well as two popular songs, and also to have a drink with him. He gave me the five taels for the assignment, as well as this little ingot of silver." She took out the ingot and put it into Jia Ming's hand. It weighed over ten ounces.

"And to think that you weren't even willing to go! Now we can buy a whole parcel of opium. That's a load off my mind."

"I'm going to keep it to buy clothes with. If I spent it on opium, it would be for *your* benefit." She lay down and began to smoke, then suddenly gave a laugh for no apparent reason. "There's something funny that I want to tell you. He adores my feet—thinks they're so small—and wants to marry me."

"Great!" said Jia Ming. He assumed she was joking and paid no attention to the remark. After smoking for a while, they got ready for bed.

The next day Ge Ren came back to fetch her for another assignment. Phoenix told Maid Gao to give him four hundred cash as a gratuity, and he went off. Once more Phoenix dressed and got herself ready and, after telling Jia Ming to wait up for her, stepped into the sedan chair. This time she did not return until the fourth watch. She smoked for a little while and then settled down to sleep. She and Jia Ming were lying in her bed when she said to him, "Master Lu really does want me to go with him, and he's prepared to pay whatever it takes to buy me out. I'd like your advice. Should I go or not?"

Jia Ming was silent as he pondered the question. "Suppose I talked you out of it," he said at last, "you don't have many clients in Yangzhou these days. In fact, I'm the only one who comes here all the time. But I'm more than ten years older than you, I have a wife and children, and I can't ask you to marry me. I'm not a rich man, either—this is all just a facade to make me look good. If I persuaded you to stay and you did well here, there'd be no problem, but if you did poorly and ended up worse off than you are now, you'd be sure to blame me and say, 'I had this marvelous opportunity, but that fellow Jia stood in my way and wouldn't let me go, and that's what brought me to this wretched state.' On the other hand, let's suppose I encouraged you to go with him. Well, in the first place the man comes from Shandong and serves in the capital, where living conditions are nowhere near as good as they are here in the south. You've lived on the West Embankment in Qingjiang,³ so I imagine you know the situation. Moreover, you're an opium smoker and he's not. He's had a sudden impulse to take you back with him, but there's no knowing whether he'll let you go on smoking. And there's one other thing. You told me yesterday that he married off a concubine of his to a tailor after the woman had borne

him a son who later got appointed to the academy. That shows you the sort of man *he* is! Look, I'm greatly obliged to you for bringing this problem to me, but I really can't settle it for you. You'll just have to work it out for yourself. If you can't, you can always go off to a temple, burn some incense, get a fortune slip, and ask the bodhisattva what's best for you."

Phoenix said nothing in reply but slept peacefully through the night.

No sooner had Jia Ming left the next morning than Phoenix sent Zhang Er to call her husband to the house. "There's someone who wants to marry me," she told him and her mother-in-law. "Work out how much money you would need to let me go."

Her husband and his mother put their heads together and said they would need four hundred thousand cash. "I joined your household when I was six years old," retorted Phoenix, "and in the dozen or more years since then, I don't know *how* much money I've made for you! Now, this is all I'm going to say: I'll ask him for three hundred thousand for both of you. With that money, you can buy a couple of other girls who'll enable you to get by."

Her husband shook his head. "It's not enough!"

"Oh, don't be so stupid! I'm not too far away from thirty, and I'm often ill. How many more years do I have left in the business? You'll have three hundred thousand, and on top of that I'll leave behind all this furniture, as well as clothes. Altogether, that's worth another two hundred thousand. Isn't *that* enough for you to live on? If you still refuse, I won't try to force you, but from now on I won't let that fellow Jia in the door, and I won't take on any other clients, either. I'll stop living off this business. I'm quite prepared to shut my door and go and beg from *you*! Just think for a moment which would be better for you." Her husband realized that she was determined to go, and after consulting his mother he accepted the offer.

Phoenix also told Zhang Er to invite her sister over. "I'm going to get married and leave for the capital," she told her. "Well, that's that. We've been together as sisters for a while. I'm giving you forty thousand cash so that you and your husband will have something to remember me by." Although Mistress Lin couldn't bear to lose her sister, she loved the thought of the money she had been offered. She said she couldn't bear to part with Phoenix, but in her heart she felt that her dearest wish had been realized.

Phoenix said to her brother, "If you'll come with me to the capital, I'll arrange a good job for you so that you can come back here." He was delighted to hear her promise of a job and readily agreed.

Having explained her decision to everyone, Phoenix had her lunch, satisfied her opium habit, and called a sedan chair to take her to the guest-house, where she reached an agreement with Master Lu. That evening she waited for Jia Ming to arrive. They had dinner, then lit the lamp and smoked. "About that matter I mentioned last night," she began, "I've made arrangements today with this fellow Lu. We'll conclude the agreement tomorrow, and on the fourth of the sixth month we'll set off. I'd be much obliged if you'd take the silver to the money shop tomorrow and divide it up in the right amounts for my husband and sister. I wouldn't trust anyone else to do it. Well, that's that. You and I have been lovers for quite some time, and you can't refuse me."

Although Jia Ming acquiesced, he felt as if he had just choked on a lump of ice. I never imagined she would be so cruel, he thought. When I first met her, she was wearing *bronze earrings*! How I helped that woman! And when opium was banned and the brothels closed and she had nowhere to go, think how pitifully she pleaded with me! I found her a house and furnished it for her, taking care of everything down to the last detail! But now that she has a home of her own and doesn't need to worry about the daily necessities, she's constantly going on about marriage. My trouble is that just now I can't come up with the full sum for her husband that would allow me to take her home. I blame myself for encouraging her to go on that assignment the other night. She's only just met this Lu, and already she has designs on his money, completely forgetting the two or three years we've spent together and all the vows she's taken. How close we've been to each other—inseparable! And now she wants to go and marry *him*! I never imagined when I wrote those lines "If you truly do not wish to leave me / Let's live out our next lives in wedded bliss" that they would turn out to be so prophetic. But now I understand: as a general rule, all courtesans are liars, no matter how sweet their words. But if I utter the slightest criticism of her and the news gets around, people are bound to say that I'm sore because she's marrying someone else after I've spent a little money on her. Oh well, he thought bitterly, I must have owed her a debt from a previous existence, and with this affair the debt is paid in full. Had this Lu not come,

we would never have parted, not even for a little while. I expect that my karmic involvement with her is now wiped clean. Let her go!

The following day one of Lu's servants brought the silver to Phoenix, who put it away in her room. "Call in a scribe to draw up a bill of sale," she said to her husband. "I'll have the silver changed into cash for you." As he went off, she gave the silver to Jia Ming, whispering something in his ear. He nodded and took the silver to the money shop and asked the clerk to convert it into two sums, one of three hundred thousand and the other of forty thousand. He brought both sums back and laid them on the table, handing Phoenix the silver that was over.

Phoenix's husband found a scribe on the street and invited him into the house, where he took brush and ink and drew up a bill of sale, which he read out to Phoenix. She told her husband to sign it first. He picked up the brush and looked at her with tears streaming down his cheeks, but she pretended not to notice, which made him angry. Hardening his heart, he made a cross and attached his thumbprint, then burst out sobbing. Mistress Dai and her eldest son, Lan Da, also signed, as well as Phoenix's brother and sister. Phoenix gave the document to Lu's servant to take away with him, while her husband and sister gathered up their money.

Jia Ming saw that the matter was now settled. Since she's so heartless, he thought, why should I be reluctant to part with her? Far better to harden my heart and let her go! He ordered a meal in a restaurant and had it delivered to Phoenix's house as a farewell dinner that evening. Although they sat drinking at the same table, the situation was very different from what it had been. Jia Ming was sunk in gloom, while Phoenix radiated happiness. After they had drunk a few cups of wine, Jia Ming said, "Very well, then. You and I have been lovers for several years, and now you're leaving me to enjoy a life of wealth and privilege. I don't suppose we shall meet again in this life. If you'd do me the honor, I'd like to ask you for a song."

Phoenix called to Maid Gao to bring her lute. She also told her to bring from the chest a pair of slippers of white imported-crepe silk embroidered with blue in the Gu style, slippers she had never worn, and placed them in front of Jia Ming. She then began strumming the lute and, after modulating her voice, sang a "Leaving the Capital Air":

These tiny silken slippers, never worn,
 I hereby give to my lover,
 To my lover,
 That he may long remember me.
 I have no choice
 But to steel my heart and marry another.
 If you should miss me,
 Just look upon these silken flowers.
 If you should wish to meet me,
 It will have to be in a midnight dream.
 If you should wish to be reunited,
 In this life it cannot be—
 You'll have to wait till the next.

When she had finished the song, she pressed the slippers into Jia Ming's hand. "Keep these as a memento."

Jia Ming put them away. "Play me a 'Lucky Grass' tune," he said. She assented and played the lute while he sang:

You want to leave, and I cannot stop you.
 The more I think, the more betrayed I feel.
 When first we loved,
 You said we'd spend our lives together.
 But who'd have thought you'd take your lute so far away?
 My best endeavors are water through a sieve,
 Employed in vain.
 They were all for you, my dear,
 But by you I am betrayed.
 They were all for you, my dear,
 But by you I am betrayed.

When he had finished his song, Phoenix handed the lute back to Maid Gao and poured a large cup of wine, which she offered to Jia Ming. "Since I came to know you," she said, "I've received countless favors from you, favors that are engraved on my heart. How could I bear to part from

you? I'm running away now because I want to use Lu's money to break off all connections with my in-laws. Within six months, or at the most in a year, I'll definitely come back to Yangzhou, and you and I can be together again."

Jia Ming took the cup and drained it in a single draft, then poured out another large cup and handed it to her. "My only hope is that you and he will have a long and happy marriage and that you'll never think of me. I hope you will forgive me if in any way I've failed to treat you properly these last few years. Take good care of yourself on the journey. There's just one thing that worries me. After you've crossed the Yellow River and are traveling by road, you'll be setting off every day at the fourth watch, and by that hour you won't have satisfied your habit. How are you going to cope?" At these words, Phoenix for the first time shed a few tears. She finished the wine in her cup and brought their dinner to a close.

The next day she took out some money and asked Jia Ming to buy her a number of odds and ends as well as a packet of opium, which she roasted ready for the journey. Jia, whose feeling for her continued as strong as ever, bought her a rosary with one hundred and eight beads of balsam from the Genuine Daichunlin Perfumery. As Phoenix received it, she undid a white jade pendant from her belt and gave it to him. Each of them kept the gifts as mementos. On the evening of the third Jia Ming and Phoenix lay on her bed and smoked opium all night. Jia Ming heaved sigh after sigh, but she said nothing.

At dawn on the fourth Lu's men arrived with a sedan chair. Phoenix hastily combed her hair, put on her makeup, and changed into new clothes. To Mistress Dai, she said, "Well, ma'am, I'm off." Her husband, brother-in-law, sister, Orchid, and Jia Ming were all there, but she did not so much as glance at any of them, just said these few words to Mistress Dai and walked out with a jaunty air. On seeing her leave, Mistress Dai, Mistress Lin, and Orchid burst out sobbing.

Jia Ming turned to Mistress Dai and snapped, "*She* doesn't cry, so why should you? Think of her as if she had just dropped dead of some disease." Phoenix was still within earshot, but she pretended not to have heard and, accompanied by her brother, went out the front gate and stepped into the sedan chair. Jia Ming waited until she had gone and then, seething with resentment, left the house and returned home.

Meanwhile, Wei Bi had heard of Phoenix's marriage and gone over to Qiang Da's to tell Lucky. "Oh, dear! That was very wrong of her," she said. "Master Jia always treated her so well in every possible way! She was in a wretched state when she arrived in Yangzhou, and if he hadn't come to her aid, I can't imagine how that family would have fared. Look at her now; she has all the necessities of life and can get by well enough. I'm surprised she was so heartless as to ignore all the love he had shown her and throw him over in order to marry someone else. If I had a client as good as that, someone who could find me a home and see to all my needs, why, with those advantages I'd *never* go with anyone else, no matter how much money he threw around. Well, that's the way it is. She turned her back on all the love and kindness that he showed her. My only fear is that now Phoenix has gone, he'll be in a terrible state."

"Just what I was thinking. Tomorrow I'll arrange to invite him over for a banquet to take his mind off it."

"You've come just at the right time. There's something I want to talk to you about."

"What is it? Please tell me."

"I was thinking of the time when all four of us, Cassia, Paria, Phoenix, and I, were here together. We were closer than sisters and had great fun. But Cassia was forced to go home because Master Wu got into trouble and she had debts that she couldn't pay. Paria has married Master Yuan and has someone she can depend on for the rest of her life. And now Phoenix has married and gone off to live in the capital. I'm the only one left in the brothel, and there's no future there. As it happens, my father was here the other day to collect his payment, and I asked him to let me have a life of my own. At first he refused, but I kept on at him day after day, and now we've come to an agreement: If I pay him two hundred silver dollars, he'll give me a signed statement granting me my freedom. I've saved up a little money over the last few years, but not as much as that. I would like to consult you about helping me out with a hundred silver dollars. If you can take me into your compound, I'll gladly serve your lady as a maidservant. If you don't feel able to do that, then find me some small place to live. The good thing is that I've cut my opium habit by more than half, to just a pellet or two, and I need only a few dozen cash a day for expenses. If you can pull me out of the fiery pit, I'll guarantee you a fine son who'll succeed in one examination after another."

Wei Bi was touched by her request, which he also found eminently reasonable—she was asking for only a hundred dollars, after all—and he readily consented. He had supper with her and stayed there that night. In bed with him, she said many sweet and loving things and repeated her request again and again. The next morning Wei Bi rose, had a breakfast of roasted lotus seeds, and then went back to the family compound and got a hundred silver dollars, which he brought to Qiang Da's and gave to Lucky.

"There's something else I need to explain to you," said Lucky.

"What's that?"

"When I spoke to my father, I never mentioned your name. I just said I'd borrow the money from somebody. If he knew that you were helping me with the money, he'd suspect that you wanted to marry me. Moreover, you're the son of an official in the Salt Administration, and no matter how much money you offered, he would always hold out for more from such a prize as that. These two hundred dollars would never be enough to persuade him. So don't come here the next two days. Think over whether you'll take me into your compound or find some place for me outside. Let me settle matters with my father and send him off home, then come back on the third day and I'll go with you. You and I are the only ones who know about this. Don't talk to anyone else in case the news leaks out. If Qiang Da and the others hear of it, they'll pester you for assignment fees, a wedding feast, and so on and so forth. You oughtn't to throw your money away on such things." Wei Bi was even happier to hear this reasoning of hers and nodded his head in agreement.

Lucky waited until he had left, then settled her account with Qiang Da, paid the various small debts she owed to others, gathered up her baggage and the articles from her room, collected all her valuables, and that night took a boat back to Yancheng with her father.

Wei Bi spent the next two days finding a house and furnishing it. He also hired a maid to attend on Lucky. On the third day, full of joyous anticipation, he presented himself at Qiang Da's, where Sanzi ushered him into Lucky's room. As soon as he walked in the door, he noticed that the scrolls on the wall and the coverlet on the bed had been changed. A maid followed him in and offered him tea and tobacco, and several prostitutes came to keep him company. "Master Wei," said Sanzi, "your favorite has

gone back to Yancheng with her father, but I'll introduce you to someone else. I wonder which courtesan will have the good fortune to take your fancy?" Astonished and deeply frustrated, Wei Bi could not even tell others about his experience lest they laugh at him. Although several courtesans were there in the room, he felt not the slightest interest in talking to any of them. After forcing himself to sit there for a while, he stood up and said, "I'll be back to impose on you another day." After leaving Qiang Da's, he went to Jia Ming's house to look for Jia and arrange to go to the Futura teahouse, where each man unburdened himself of his grievances.

People who grieve shouldn't meet and converse,
For grief that's spoken of only gets worse.

If you are wondering what they said to each other, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER THIRTY

Yuan You falls ill in celebrating midautumn;

Paria prays to the gods while burning incense at night.

Wei Bi had invited Jia Ming to the Futura teahouse for a talk. “I did *so* much for her these last few years!” exclaimed Jia Ming. “When I had a bad foot, she visited me every day to prepare and apply the medicine and to nurse me. When I had trouble with my eyes, she slept on my bed at night and licked my eyes until the fifth watch. We were together all the time, and she swore vow after vow that she would live and die with me and never part from me for an instant. And so I thought she was sincere, and I spent my money freely on her—I don’t know how much it came to altogether! But then she meets this man Lu, has two assignments, and suddenly, without even forming a friendship, goes off with him! It just goes to show that, no matter how sweet their words are, all courtesans are deceivers. But I haven’t seen you these last few days. How is your favorite?”

“Don’t ask about *her*!” said Wei Bi with a sigh. He detailed all the various favors he had done for Lucky, stressed how close and loving she had been to him, and then told how she had cheated him out of his money and gone back to Yancheng with her father.

Jia Ming was appalled. Both men expressed themselves angrily, and the more they did so, the more resentful they became. “You and I are to blame for getting so attached to the brothel scene,” said Jia Ming at last. “We brought this frustration on ourselves, but now it’s over and done with, and

it's no good talking about it. I haven't seen Brother Yuan the last few days. Why don't we go and visit him?" Wei Bi agreed and took care of the bill.

At the house where Yuan You and Paria were living on Old Lane they rapped on the door, and Maid Wang ushered them in. Yuan You came forward to welcome them, and they greeted one another. Jia Ming and Wei Bi called out to their sister-in-law, asking her to come out and exchange greetings, but Paria addressed them politely from the next room and chose not to come out, a decision that impressed them greatly. Because Jia Ming was an opium smoker, Yuan You invited the visitors into the reception room, where he told Maid Wang to light the opium lamp on the platform bed. The three men had not seen each other in several days, and they chatted casually until Yuan You asked about Phoenix and Lucky. Each man then gave a detailed account of his experience.

"They say love is free in the pleasure quarter," said Yuan You, "but actually it's determined by our past lives. One woman marries somebody else, another one goes off home. In my humble opinion, brothers, if you look at your experience in the right way, you'll see that while you do miss the women in some respects, the karmic debts you owed them are now wiped clean. I would urge you not to be upset."

This idea came as a revelation to both Jia Ming and Wei Bi. "So it's a good thing, then, karmic fate? Our debts are paid in full! From now on we'll think of the women as if they had dropped dead of a sudden illness. We won't mention their names again."

"We haven't seen each other in days," said Yuan You. "Stay and have a simple meal here tonight so that we can talk." They accepted the invitation, and Yuan You sent someone out to a restaurant to buy several dishes.

As they were drinking their wine, Jia Ming asked, "Have you had any word from Brother Lu since he went home?"

"He hasn't written, but the other day I met a friend from Changshu and I asked about him. He told me that since Brother Lu came back from Yangzhou, he has been severely punished by his father and confined to the house. He has now developed chancres all over his body, and they don't know if he'll survive. I've felt wretched ever since I heard that."

"We don't know that it's true," said Jia Ming, "but if it is, and he loses his life to syphilis at such an early age, his death would have to be laid at

Fragrance's door. I wonder where she is now. A treacherous woman like that does an immense amount of harm."

"Brother Yuan said just now that these things are determined by our past lives," said Wei Bi as the two men sighed. "How true that is!" After supper the visitors took their leave.

Time flew by, and soon it was the Midautumn Festival. Early that morning Yuan You returned to pay his respects to his parents and then went on to Jia Ming's house to wish him compliments of the season. He found Jia Ming at home, and they exchanged compliments. Yuan was invited in, and a servant offered tea and tobacco. "When I think back on the time when Brother Lu was here in Yangzhou, we'd carouse and enjoy ourselves day and night," said Jia Ming. "What fun it was! But since he left, and since Brother Wu was framed and sent into exile, Cassia has gone back to her family and Lucky has cheated Brother Wei out of his money and returned home. Only you, by taking our sister-in-law as your wife, have gained your heart's desire. Now, don't take me wrong when I say this, but the fact that you and your principal wife don't get along is the one flaw in an otherwise perfect arrangement. My own lover ignored the affection we felt for each other and actually married someone else. For the first few days after she left, I couldn't get her out of my mind, day or night. I felt as if I'd suffered a dreadful loss. Then I heard what you said at your house about karmic debts being paid off, and I had a revelation; I saw her as dead and no longer gave a thought to my broken heart, but last night as I was gazing up at the full moon, I started thinking of her again, I don't know why. Then in a playful mood I wrote a lyric that I'd like to show you for your opinion."

"I have no talent for that sort of thing, but I'd still like to hear it." Jia Ming went into the study and fetched a sheet of waxed writing paper flecked with gold, which Yuan You studied:

Amid the cricket's chirp
 And the cassia's scent,
 A goose's honking sends my thoughts elsewhere.
 I call to mind our boundless love when first we met,
 Until her sudden parting
 Left me in despair.
 I hear the tinkling of the chimes,

On and on without an end.
 So hard to bear!
 She's gone,
 And I'm alone in an empty house,
 Wandering here and there.
 I wonder how you are,
 And ask the moon.
 I saw you in the moon's light once,
 In your heart confiding
 Some secret care.
 It's good to dwell on old friends,
 On the Yangzhou of yesteryear.

(TO THE TUNE "REMEMBERING THE FLUTE MUSIC
 ON PHOENIX TERRACE")

Yuan You praised it repeatedly. "The wording is fresh and original. Your foolish love and her faithlessness come through very clearly. Wonderful! But since she's been so disloyal and ungrateful, you really oughtn't to be hankering after her."

"She's a heartless monster, that's what she is! She took all the favors I had done for her over the years and cast them to the winds, then went off with someone she hardly knew! No one hankers after *her*! Last night I just chanced to think of what happened between us and dashed this off for my own amusement."

They exchanged some more conversation, and then Yuan You got up to take his leave. "I'll say good-bye now. I still have to go to Brother Wei's and wish him compliments of the season. I'll see you in a day or two."

"In that case, I won't try to persuade you to stay. I'll go over to your house and wish them compliments of the season."

"You're too kind." Jia Ming saw him to the gate, where they bowed and parted.

After visiting Wei Bi's compound, Yuan You returned to Paria's and sent someone out for fruit. There was a brilliant full moon, and he set out flowers and fruit in sacrifice and burned incense and lit candles. After he and Paria had honored both the Emperor and the Goddess of the Moon,

they brought out fruit and delicacies and drank together while enjoying the moonlight. When they were a little high, Paria said, "I used to feel sorry for myself because I was so ill-fated as to become a prostitute. I once read in the *Ninety-nine Bamboo Branch Songs of the Yangzhou Pleasure Quarter* a poem that went like this:

In vain do I sleep each day with clients,
For karma is make-believe when we meet.
Midautumn may be the Feast of Reunion,
But *my* union is still far from complete.

Every midautumn I think of that poem, and I always sigh and shed a few tears. But last year I had no client at midautumn, and I chanted this poem over and over again, reciting it the whole night, and the more I savored it, the more meaning I found in it. I think that the poet was able to understand the world of prostitution down to the last detail. I fully expected to grow old in the brothel, with no chance of escape. To my great joy, you plucked me out of the sea of woe, and now I have someone to depend on for the rest of my life. But tonight I ask myself before this full moon: can our union last?"

"Now you're being silly! I do have a wife, but she and I are like strangers to each other. Since you've attached yourself to me for life, we can be together all the time for the rest of our days. Why do you have to come up with such an unlucky thought? Tonight, in the presence of the Moon Goddess, if I should have a single disloyal thought in my head, may I last no longer than this moon!" He took a large cup, filled it to the brim with wine, and offered it to Paria. She drained it, then filled another large cup and offered it to him, and he did the same.

She then filled a third cup and said to him, "Tonight, on the Feast of Reunion, I offer you this pledging cup. My dearest wish is that you and I may be together like a moon that's perpetually full, so long as we both shall live."

He took the cup from her and drained it in a single draft. "May your wish come true!"

He went on, "That poem you made up for the drinking game was concise and yet coherent. And since you're fond of the poem you just quoted, I expect you're a good poet. I'd like to hear a poem from you."

"You're making me out to be far cleverer than I am. What makes you think I can write poetry?"

"Don't take me for a complete ignoramus! I really do want to hear a poem from you. If you won't give me one, I'll fine you a big bowl of wine."

"I give in. If you insist that I make a fool of myself, please set the topic and the rhyme for me."

"I don't know anything about topics. Just take what's in front of your eyes. And as for a rhyme, use the one in that bamboo branch song you just quoted."

She thought for a moment before chanting a poem:

I once had a dream of mandarin ducks;
Our lives will surely accord with our fate.
We oughtn't to waste this Reunion Day,
So in front of the moon let's celebrate.

Yuan You praised the poem again and again. He drank a large cup himself, then handed one to her. Wine flowed freely, and they enjoyed so much talk and laughter that it was midnight before they knew it. By that time Yuan was hopelessly drunk, and Paria helped him to bed. Maid Wang gathered up the leftovers, wiped the table, and swept the terrace. Paria saw to the doors and the candles before going to bed herself. This was the Feast of Reunion, and after sleeping for a while, Yuan You awoke with a clear head, and he and Paria did a rather commonplace thing beneath the bedclothes that I cannot describe in detail.

Next morning when Yuan You got up, he had a slight cough but thought nothing of it. Six or seven days later, however, he began to bring up phlegm with specks of blood. Alarmed, Paria sent at once for a doctor, who came and examined Yuan You and said there was trouble in both his liver and his lungs. He must take care that the condition not persist, for it would lead to his vomiting blood and become very serious. He wrote out a prescription, and Paria sent someone out for the ingredients, then fanned the brazier and herself decocted the medicine. Yuan You took it, but to no effect. This situation continued for days, with Paria diligently calling in new doctors and making up new prescriptions. After half a month had

gone by, Yuan You began to vomit a great deal of blood. Paria grew even more alarmed and called in several doctors each day to examine him and write prescriptions. But whatever medicine he took, it had no more effect than a stone cast into a pond. After a month, his breathing also became labored, and he began to take less and less food and drink. He was now too weak to get up and move about, and gradually he became emaciated. His condition was growing steadily worse.

Yuan You's father visited him daily. Returning from one such visit, he told Mistress Du that her husband's illness was becoming worse by the day and that she should go to Paria's house and see him. She could hardly ignore her father-in-law's wishes and, calling a sedan chair and taking a servant with her, she went to Paria's door, where she stepped out of the sedan chair and her servant took a message inside. Paria at once came to the door to welcome the visitor and, seeing who it was, called out, "Madam, please come in and sit down," to which Mistress Du made no reply. Paria invited her into the reception room, then went into her own room and brought out a red rug that she spread on the ground. "Madam, please take a seat so that I can pay my respects to you," she said, kneeling down before her. Madam Du still did not answer, nor did she return the greeting. The servant she had brought with her was so embarrassed at the sight that she went and helped Paria up, after which Mistress Du did take a seat. Paria herself offered tea, while Maid Wang filled the pipe with tobacco. Paria sent the maid out to the bakery to buy four plates of fine pastries as well as an extra four boxes.

Mistress Du noticed that the door on the eastern side of the room had a curtain, and since Paria had brought the rug from there, she concluded it must be Yuan You's bedroom. She got to her feet and went in. Yuan You was lying on the bed. He had been most unhappy to hear of her arrival, and now that he saw her coming into the room, he turned over to face the wall and pretended to be asleep. Noticing that his face was a good deal thinner than it had been, she walked up to the bed and shouted, "Husband, how have you been these last few days? I've come specially to see you."

Yuan You pretended to be sound asleep and did not utter a word, which drove her into a fury, and she turned and left the room. Maid Wang was just coming back with the pastries at the time. She set out the four dishes on the table and again offered Mistress Du tea and invited her to take a

seat. Paria stood beside the table and with great deference offered the pastries to Mistress Du. "Do try some of these, Madam," she said.

But Mistress Du would eat nothing. Pointing at Paria, she launched into a tirade: "You witch, you! You were the one who brought my husband to the state he's in! I'm here today for two reasons: first, to see how he is, and second, and especially, to hand him over to you. If he recovers, you will be left in peace, but if anything unfortunate does happen to him, don't you imagine for one moment, you witch, that you'll be able to keep a head on your shoulders!" With that, she stood up to leave.

Paria could not persuade her to stay. She told Maid Wang to light two sticks of benzoin and give them and the four boxes of pastries to the servant who had accompanied her. Paria saw her as far as the main gate and watched as she stepped into the sedan chair and left. Then she told Maid Wang to lock the gate and hurried inside again.

From his bed Yuan You had heard what his wife said to Paria in the reception room, and he would have dearly loved to go out and give her a beating, but his illness was so severe it made walking difficult, if not impossible. He lay on the bed angry and distraught, gasping and wheezing, scarcely able to draw breath. When he heard that his wife had left, he had to struggle for some time before he could even call Paria. She was coming back into the house at the time and, hearing his call, she rushed into the room.

"That shrew of mine said a lot of unreasonable things to offend you just now," said Yuan You, "but for my sake don't hate her for it."

"You're quite wrong there. What Madam said on coming here was not in the least unreasonable, and I would never presume to criticize her. To be fair, if it were my husband who hadn't been home in a long while and had now come down with an illness in someone else's house, and if I went there and saw that he was seriously ill, and he ignored me after I called out to him—then even I would get furious and say those things. Now, stop being angry and pay some attention to your health. So long as you get better, even if your wife screams at me every day, I won't mind." This response gave Yuan You an even greater regard for her kindness and virtue.

Since Yuan You was confined by his illness to the house, Jia Ming and Wei Bi made frequent visits. They also met Paria, but only to exchange greetings, nothing more. Yuan's condition grew steadily worse, and every

morning Paria took a sedan chair to the local monasteries, temples, and shrines to ask for magical prescriptions, fortune slips, and divinations. She also invited famous doctors from all around to come and examine him. She herself decocted the medicine and prepared various kinds of food and drink to build up his strength and help him recuperate. In the evening she would attend on him until he was sound asleep and then, in the middle of the night, go out into the courtyard. There she would set up an incense altar open to the heavens and start burning sandalwood incense, then kneel down on the ground in front of the altar and pray to heaven: "From childhood thy disciple had a cruel fate—she fell into prostitution. Luckily she met Master Yuan, who rescued her from the sea of woe and allowed her to depend on him for the rest of her life. Unfortunately, he has become ill with consumption. He has been seen by doctors and taken their medicines, but to no avail. Thy disciple is alone in the world, without parents, siblings, or children, free of all concerns, and she is willing to die in his place. She beseeches thee to grant her husband a recovery from his illness. Let him serve his parents and have children so that the family line does not die out. O heaven, take pity on thy disciple's sincere prayer, and she will die without regret." She wept as she kowtowed.

Every night she knelt on the ground and prayed in this fashion, ignoring the pain as blood oozed from her forehead as a result of her kowtowing. Not until Yuan You awakened from his sleep and called out to her did she get up and go back inside the house to take him his tea and broth. She did not sleep all night.

If you are wondering about Yuan's health, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

*A husband, dying young, checks his loans and gives final instructions,
And a wife, crazed with love, takes poison and sacrifices herself.*

Yuan You's condition grew steadily worse, and after three months he could not even get out of bed. Paria called in well-known and well-regarded doctors from everywhere around, all of whom said that his pulse was extremely weak and his life in danger. They gave a variety of excuses for not writing a prescription, until Paria went down on her knees before them and begged for one. Then, after consulting together, they very reluctantly wrote out a prescription for ginseng broth, after which they collected the money for it, as well as their fares and tips, got into their sedan chairs, and left. Paria hastily took out some money and gave it to Yuan Shou, Yuan You's father, to take to the shop and buy ginseng. She decocted the medicine and herself gave it to Yuan You, but again to no effect.

One evening, after his parents had returned home, Yuan You asked Paria to get out the box containing his loan contracts and put it on the bed beside him. Breathing heavily, he opened the box and examined his numerous contracts one by one, then said to her, "It was foolish of me to bring you here. The truth is, I was hoping you and I could be together forever, but my allotted span is over, and I am about to abandon you in the middle of the journey. These contracts result from several years of hard work as well as from the capital you provided. The sum total of all my loans is five or six hundred taels. I realized some time ago that this illness of mine was next to incurable, so I noted on the back of each contract the borrower's

address and occupation. Fortunately, you can read, so you'll be able to tell at a glance who is involved. Today, while I still have breath in my body, I've examined all the contracts and I'm now handing them over to you. After I'm dead, I don't suppose for one moment that my jealous wife will take you in. You'll need to be patient in the face of everything that is about to happen. Wait until I'm buried, then make the most of your youth and choose some trustworthy young man for yourself. With these contracts in hand, call the loans in over time; they should give you enough to get by on for the rest of your life. In the months that I've been ill, poor dear, you've prepared the medicine and brought it to me, getting no rest day or night; you've taken great pains in nursing me; and you've been worried the whole of the time. I've caused you a lot of trouble, and all for nothing. You and I are fated to share only this brief interlude of love. As the saying goes, 'We can't escape the day of our death.' You must take good care of yourself and not pine for me." As he said this, he could not stop the tears from streaming down his cheeks.

Paria felt as if a knife were twisting in her heart; she sobbed so hard that she choked and couldn't speak. But she was afraid that if she sobbed too hard it would only deepen his melancholy mood, so she had to restrain herself. "You're the one who should take good care of himself," she said. "I pray that heaven has eyes to see and that it grants you a sudden recovery, that your illness leaves you, and that you father a child or two to continue the family line. But if anything should happen to you, just think how wretched *my* fate would be. I lost my parents as a child and fell into prostitution. Fortunately, you rescued me from the fiery pit, and I was truly hoping to spend the rest of my life with you and that we would grow old together. But if we are to part halfway, it would fit the saying 'You can't recover from a bad beginning.' With a fate as wretched as mine, how could I even think of marrying anyone else? And as for living out my widowhood in your house, well, forgive me for saying it, but your good lady would never accept me. No, my mind is made up. If you should suddenly abandon me, since I have no children or other responsibilities, I shall follow you to the netherworld to face the judge of hell together and be with you for a hundred years. Isn't that better than suffering alone here on earth?"

Yuan You suspected that she was saying these stirring things just to stop him from feeling too depressed. He gave a faint smile. "A young person

like you shouldn't talk such nonsense. You're in the flower of your youth. This is the right time for you to marry and enjoy the riches and honors that await you. Quickly now, put those loan contracts back in the box. I need to relieve myself."

Paria put them in the box and took it away. She called in Maid Wang, and together they helped Yuan You out of bed. Paria pulled down his underwear and sat him on the commode. When he had finished, she pulled up his underwear again and helped him back into bed. He was gasping for breath, and the sweat was running down his face. She wiped off the sweat with a handkerchief and told Maid Wang to get a little ginseng broth and give it to him to drink, after which his breathing gradually returned to normal. Then she helped him lie down again.

Once more she went out to burn incense and pray in the courtyard, and wept all night. Next morning she noticed that Yuan You's condition was worse and realized that it was becoming graver by the day, an indication that he was near death. She secretly consulted Yuan Shou about his son's funeral, in the hope that such preparations might change Yuan You's fortune.¹ She took out some money and gave it to Yuan Shou to go to the coffin shop and choose some sandalwood boards, negotiate a price for them, and have the coffin made. She also bought some material and called in a tailor to make burial garments for her husband. Everything was in readiness.

One day Yuan You was in an even graver state and fainted several times. Paria almost cried herself into unconsciousness. Yuan Shou concluded from his son's condition that he would not last many more days and sent a servant home with a message for Mistress Du to come. "Tell the master and mistress that that man doesn't have me for a wife and I don't have him for a husband," she replied. "I went to see him the other day with the best of intentions, but he made out he didn't know I was there and turned his face to the wall, pretending to be asleep and not saying a word. Since he has no feeling for me, I can hardly be blamed for not showing any loyalty to him. If I go there now, he'll still have nothing to say to me. I might as well wait until he has breathed his last and then go there in my mourning garments." The servant returned to Old Lane to report what she had said, and Yuan Shou and his wife were speechless with fury.

Yuan You was lying on the bed with Paria sitting beside him, not leaving him for an instant. She saw that he couldn't speak and that his limbs

were growing cold. He couldn't even swallow a sip of boiled water. All that was left was a very faint breathing as if he were in his last throes. Realizing that the end was near, she gave his parents some disingenuous advice, "Sir, Madam, let me make a suggestion: I can see from the master's condition that he will probably not last the night. Why not take advantage of this quiet spell to go home and see to things there? Once you return, you won't be able to go home again."

"You're quite right," they said and went home to make arrangements.

Paria waited until they had left, then pretended to have a sharp pain in her chest. She told Maid Wang to buy four ounces of sorghum liquor and bring it to her. "It hurts me terribly to breathe," she said. "I'd like to take a cup or two of liquor and then lie down and rest. See you don't come in and disturb me. Just keep an eye on the gruel on the stove in case the master wakes up and wants some." Maid Wang assumed that after days and nights of hard work her mistress really did need to rest.

Paria opened the trunk in her room, took out the clothes she had always loved to wear, and put them on. She also put on new foot bindings, stocking wrappers, and shoes and fetched brush, ink, and inkstone and placed them on the table. She ground up the ink and took a sheet of bamboo paper and spread it out on the table. Sitting down on a stool in front of the table, she searched her thoughts for what she wanted to say, then picked up the brush and wrote as follows:

Mine is an unlucky fate; I was born under an evil star. While I was still a child my parents died, as did my brothers and sisters. I regret to say that I descended into prostitution, and I am ashamed to speak of my background. I've been like peach blossom at the mercy of the waves or willow floss adrift in the wind. I've had my fill of misery, welcoming one man after seeing another off; by sleeping with them, I have repaid all my sins from a previous life. I was lucky enough to meet Master Yuan, who rescued me from the sea of woe. He and his wife were estranged from each other, and, although I was only a concubine, I enjoyed a monopoly of his affection. Others might have found this an enviable situation, but I was saddened by it. I was sorry that I lacked the means to bring them together again—I would gladly have endured the wife's abuse. For my part, I thought I had someone I could depend on for life, and I was full

of hope that we would grow old together. But we cannot shape destiny to our own ends, and my husband fell gravely ill. When medicines had no effect, I foolishly thought that my heartfelt prayers might move the gods, but although I observed a strict fast, heaven and earth did not respond.

I assumed that when we shared the same bed, our karmic fates had been fulfilled. Why should we not be laid in the same coffin, fulfilling the prediction of a dream I once had? When the trees entwined have withered, what call is there for the woodman's axe? When the lovebirds' wings are broken, what need is there for the hunter's bow? My husband is on the point of death—how dare I eke out a base existence on my own? Were I to carry out my vow to die with him, it would be hard to escape the charge of throwing my life away. But my concern is that on death's journey he will be afraid. I have always heard that the road to the netherworld is rugged and hard, and my husband has difficulty walking because of his illness; how could he bear to travel that road alone? It would be better if I were to die first and then, even if the way to the netherworld proves hard to travel, I would be able to help him with all the vigor of my youth. Hand in hand, we would go to the City of Wrongful Death and have our karmic debts from this life removed. With heads bowed, we would ascend together to Yama's palace and beg to be reunited in the next life.

But no farewell to life can be adequately expressed in prose. I have wept all my tears in writing this, and I now express my passion in verse:

ETERNAL FAREWELL

Where is it from, this airy gossamer
That floats on the wind with nowhere to rest?
Yancheng town is the place I was born,
But my parents died and left me alone,
Like willow floss adrift in a tempest
Or like peach blossom afloat on a stream.
Pity my sad fate, my fall into disgrace;
Instead of the needle, I studied the lute.
One day I was sent to Yangzhou city,
To a house of joy where I rued my fate.

Innocent, yet forced into a life of shame,
Still shy when I began to receive men,
Man after man, for some karmic cause.
Night and day I endured my punishment,
Resigning myself to the brothel life,
Where I met by chance the one who saved me.
Too ashamed to monopolize his love,
Abashed before his lawful, wedded wife,
Often I urged him to make up with her
In the hope that the pair could reconcile.
But my husband was stubborn and refused,
Causing me constant distress and pain.
If he treated his wife as a stranger,
I would be the one the public would blame.
Day and night I urged him, but in vain;
On moonlit nights I forced myself to smile.
I well recall the moonlight at midautumn,
When he drank his wine and I sang my songs.
But the height of joy should never be reached,
For that is the time when demons are born.
In the midst of revelry, troubles grew;
My husband fell ill and could not recover.
Despite the doctors, he only grew worse;
My prayers and my vows were all in vain.
I had hoped we would grow old together;
Once I dreamt of two ducks on the water,
Alas, a hunter's arrow pierced their wings,
And still they did not part, but stayed as a pair.
I watched him moaning in pain on the bed,
Now desperately ill and close to death.
The netherworld road is hard to travel;
How could he walk it in his weakened state?
Better that I go first and wait for him,
Holding his hand as we enter that world.
Let people laugh at my too crazy love;
For the truth is, it's not crazy at all.

Their love isn't crazy to the very end,
 While mine is absolute, without reserve.
 We'll emulate the deaths of those two ducks;
 In the life to come we'll be trees entwined.
 Have the best of craftsmen choose a great tree
 And make for us both a double coffin.
 It's not that I would not be a widow,
 But I fear the lonely nights without him.
Oh!
 In chanting this "Eternal Farewell,"
 I cry over every word I utter.

She laid the brush down on the table and chanted the poem to herself in a low voice. Tears welled up in her eyes, but she didn't dare start sobbing lest Maid Wang hear and come to see how she was. She stood up and took the opium that Yuan You kept for his sworn brothers' visits, of which four or five *qian* remained, and mixed it with the liquor. She then looked at Yuan You, who was still unconscious, and went up to the bed and felt his limbs, which were ice-cold although his face was running with sweat. She called out "husband" several times, but he showed no awareness of her. She assumed he was on the point of death, with no hope of surviving, and said to herself, "Walk slowly, husband. Let your ill-starred wife go on ahead. I'll be waiting for you at the gates. In your weakened state you cannot walk by yourself. Let me take your hand and go with you." Then she held up the bowl of liquor mixed with opium, put it to her lips, and drained it in a single draft. Flinging the bowl aside, she lay down on the bed and slept, sharing the pillow with Yuan You.

Maid Wang had been sitting quietly in the reception room watching the brazier for some time. When she heard nothing from next door, she assumed that Paria had gone to sleep, worn out from her day-and-night labors. Tiptoeing into the room, she found her mistress lying on the bed dressed in new clothes, which at once aroused her suspicions. She rushed to the bedside and called out her name several times, but Paria, her face to the wall, made no reply. This caused Maid Wang to be even more suspicious, and she searched all around until she discovered under the bed a teacup with traces of opium in it. She put it to her nose—it smelled of liquor—and she realized that Paria had taken raw opium.

In this moment of panic Yuan You's parents happened to return, and Maid Wang immediately told them what she had found. Alarmed, they at once sent out for liquid manure and a white duck. In looking about the room, Yuan Shou noticed on the table a sheet of bamboo paper covered with writing, and he picked it up and read it. Although he was a military graduate, he had a fair knowledge of literature and was quite a capable poet. He read the sheet from start to finish, and tears came into his eyes. Turning to his wife, he said, "With talent such as hers, and with the determination she has shown today to die with her husband, she's a paragon among courtesans, as well as a great blessing to our family!"

As he said this, the servant returned with the liquid manure and the white duck. They killed the duck, drew off its blood, and mixed it with the manure, then tried to get the mixture down Paria's throat, but she clenched her teeth and refused to open her mouth. Yuan You's mother and Maid Wang managed to hold her while they tried to force it into her, but as soon as it reached her lips, she frantically spat it out, and they could get none of it down. After further struggle, the opium in poor Paria's stomach began to work, and she rolled off the bed only to scramble up again. This situation continued for several hours until dusk, when, sad to relate, her body turned purple, blood oozed from her orifices, and she died. At the very moment of her death, the phlegm in Yuan You's throat shot forth, and they breathed their last together.

A love-crazed pair die in a single moment;
Two crazed spirits head for the courts of hell.

When Yuan Shou and his wife saw that both their son and Paria were dead, they stroked the bodies and sobbed bitterly. At once they sent servants to call Mistress Du and take the news to friends and relatives, who came to mourn in great numbers. Among the mourners were Jia Ming and Wei Bi, who, like the others, were astonished to hear that Paria had chosen to die with her husband. Yuan Shou brought out the "Eternal Farewell" that Paria had left behind at her death and showed it to everyone, and they were deeply moved. Some of them took it upon themselves to copy it out, and in the teahouses and taverns of the city it became a sensational topic of discussion.

Let me turn to Mistress Du, who was not in the least distressed to receive the message that her husband had died. Calling for a sedan chair, she went to the house on Old Lane. When she found Yuan You's and Paria's corpses lying on the same bed in Paria's room, she flew into a rage and ordered her servants to take Paria's body off the bed and lay it on the floor. Then, affecting a tragic voice, she sobbed, "Husband! You treated your wife as a stranger and spent all your time lusting after this witch. That's what brought on your illness and caused your death in this place. Here am I, with no children and no one I can depend on. What am I to do?" Putting on her mourning garments, she noticed that Paria was dressed in new clothes and told her maid to strip Paria's body and wear the clothes herself. She also told the maid to dress Paria in her own threadbare garments.

While Mistress Du was in the middle of her rampage, Yuan Shou had sent a servant to the coffin shop to collect the coffin made for Yuan You. He also bought a twelve-board coffin with a flower design intended for Paria's laying-in. But the two coffins had no sooner been carried in than Mistress Du realized one of them was to hold Paria. "This vile witch brought my husband to his death," she raged. "Take her body out this instant and throw it in the wilds so that pigs and dogs can gnaw on her bones and eagles tear at her heart and liver. Even that would not be enough to satisfy me. You spent a lot of money on her coffin—well, she's out of luck!" She ordered the coffin taken back to the shop.

She ignored the pleas of Yuan You's parents, who became so distraught that they fumed and sobbed. Then her women relatives tried to intervene. "Enmity stops at death," they urged. "Your own family bought that coffin for her. It's already been paid for and delivered. How can you justify sending it back? Think of it as a kind deed you've done. Let it be!"

"If they don't do as I say and take that coffin back, I'll dash my brains out right here and now, and then you can put me in that coffin instead of her. Once my eyes are closed, you can buy whatever chestnut or sandalwood coffin you like for her. I won't see it, so I won't get angry." She banged her head against the coffin and rolled on the ground, raging on and on without a pause. When the women saw how badly she was behaving despite their advice, they ceased trying to stop her.

Yuan Shou was afraid she really might try to kill herself, so he choked back his anger and told the men who had brought the coffin to return it

to the shop. Mistress Du's brother, Du Fuyu, insisted on taking charge. He told Yuan Shou to buy a cheap coffin and quickly lay Paria's body in it. Yuan Shou, who had been moved by Paria's wholehearted devotion to his son, as well as by her determination to die with him, had intended to place her coffin beside his and then, at the funeral, to have both coffins brought out and buried together in the family tomb. But when he saw the manic way in which Mistress Du was behaving, he could not very well keep her coffin at home but had to have it carried outside West Gate. On the west side of Dutian Temple he bought a grave site and had her buried there. Later he called in Buddhist and Daoist priests and yin-yang masters and had Yuan You laid in his coffin, which he kept in the house on Old Lane. After the laying-in, the friends and relatives knelt down before the coffin.

A contemporary poet was impressed by the fact that Paria, although originally a courtesan, had so passionate a nature as to sacrifice herself in order to die with her husband. Hers was a rare case in the world of prostitution, he believed, and what she did was an extraordinary act. He wrote an old-style poem about her:

Prostitutes come from houses of ill fame;
 Even if they marry, they rarely succeed.
 Has any such marriage lasted to the end?
 A sacrifice like hers is rare indeed.

How sad that she fell into prostitution!
 With a touch of rouge, a flowerlike face,
 Her singing would rival the songbird's notes,
 Her dancing summon the phoenix's grace.

As a girl of only fourteen summers,
 In this milieu a wonder to behold.
 Young blades who loved her talent and beauty
 Would not have begrudged a fortune in gold.

From the time she promised her love to Yuan,
 She was determined to marry, she swore,

But gaily emerging from degradation,
She heard every day the she-lion's roar.²

Her delicate beauty suffered abuse;
Where can a cure for jealousy be found?
Fierce winds set the willow floss dancing,
And showers strewed blossoms over the ground.

Too listless to powder her tear-stained face,
The shame and sorrow she contrived to bear.
Through bitterly cold nights she could not sleep,
And in her room she yielded to despair.

"Pretty face, sad fate"—as sad as can be.
While he was too weak to rise from his bed,
She devotedly nursed and tended him,
Pleading with the gods to die in his stead.

Worried that his life was nearing its end,
On her own personal savings she freely drew.
Marry again while you're young, he told her.
If you go, she answered, I'll go with you.

In secret she mixed opium with liquor;
As she swallowed it down her face changed hue.
Without a care she threw herself away,
Hoping in the next life to wed anew.

That the world should hold such a love-crazed pair,
Who shared a bed in life and died as one!
The boat's oar startles the ducks into flight;
The axe falls, the trees entwined are undone.

With the ducks in flight and the trees undone,
The dream is cut short and the hour is late.

Alas!

If whores can follow their men to the grave,
Shame on the wellborn who take a new mate!

There were others, too, who took her actions as the subject of their poetry and exchanged countless poems with their friends, but it is impossible to do justice to them here.

Yuan Shou could not bear the thought that, after Paria had given up her life to die with her husband, he had not been able to lay her body in a good coffin. He waited until the hundredth day after Yuan You's funeral and then invited the local warden and neighbors to sign a joint petition to confer on Paria a title of posthumous nobility. They took their petition to the director of studies and the magistrate of Jiangdu county and formally requested that the honor be conferred.

If you are wondering whether the petition was granted, please turn to the next chapter.



CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

*A convict is sent into exile in accordance with the law,
And a heroic woman's tablet is enshrined by the emperor's grace.*

Because Paria had sacrificed her life to die with her husband, Yuan Shou had been filled with admiration for her and had invited the warden and the neighbors to join him in presenting a petition to both the director of studies and the magistrate of Jiangdu county. The officials accepted the petition and within a few days approved it, each appending a statement of his own findings. They then prepared a document to submit to the prefect of Yangzhou, the intendant of the Huaiyang circuit, and the Jiangning lieutenant governor of the province. Each of these men appended his own statement and sent it on to the governor, the director of studies, and the governor-general of Liangjiang, who made a joint submission to the emperor. After Yuan Shou had received the officials' endorsement, he wrote out an announcement on yellow paper entitled "Petition Requesting Bestowal of Honor by Emperor Endorsed by Three High Officials," stuck it on both sides of his gate, and awaited news of the emperor's response.

Let me turn to Wu Zhen, who had been locked up in the Ganquan county jail for over a year. One day the governor of Jiangsu received an urgent warrant from the Ministry of Justice. His office then drew up a document and sent it on to Ganquan county. On receipt of it, the magistrate promptly told his clerk to prepare both full and summary reports with signed comments and detailed two men to serve as prisoner escorts. (Their names were none other than Zhang Qian and Li Wan.¹) Next morning he

authorized the jail warden to check the name and transfer the prisoner, then issued a warrant and gave it to the escorts to take to the prison and fetch him. Wu Zhen had learned the day before that the warrant was due to arrive and had sent word home in time. Hearing that the escorts had come for him, he brought his baggage and clothes out of his cell. The escorts took him to the jail warden's office to wait until the warden mounted his tribunal, checked Wu Zhen's name, examined his manacles, and issued money for rations. He sealed up the warrant and the two reports and handed them to the escorts, then left the tribunal. The escorts brought Wu Zhen out of the jail, called a porter to carry his baggage, and took him out of the city by way of South Gate.

Wu Zhen's wife, Mistress Wang, and their two sons—the elder eleven years old, the younger just nine—accompanied by her two brothers had stationed themselves at the end of the road to greet him. His brothers-in-law invited Wu Zhen and the escorts to a quiet restaurant, where they and the escorts drank wine while Wu Zhen and his wife sat off to one side. "It was foolish of me to dally with a courtesan and incite someone's hatred," said Wu Zhen. "I was framed, and now I'm on my way into exile, leaving you on your own while still a young woman." He pointed to his two sons. "Our brats are still very young. You'll need to be strict with them and see that they work hard at their studies. When they grow up, they must learn to behave properly. Don't let them go near any brothels. If they don't obey you, you can use what is happening to me today as a warning. I doubt that after this I'll ever be able to come home again; if we are to meet again, it will have to be in the next life, and I leave all of the family responsibilities in your hands. But now my heart is beating too wildly, and I can't say any more." His eyes filled with tears.

Mistress Wang and the two boys cried their eyes out. At length, fighting back her tears, she said, "Don't worry about the family. I'll do everything in my power to support them. I only hope that after a year or so there'll be an amnesty and we can be reunited. See you take good care of yourself on the road. When you get there, send me a letter to put my mind at rest." She began sobbing again. Her brothers came over to calm her, and she and Wu Zhen finally stopped their crying. The brothers consoled Wu Zhen for a while, then led him over to their table.

"I'm asking you to look after the family for me," said Wu Zhen. "My two boys will be relying on you for discipline."

"Don't worry," they said. "We'll make a point of looking after things. Take good care of yourself on the journey." They urged Wu Zhen and the two escorts to eat and drink. The brothers then paid the bill, and Mistress Wang gave her husband clothes for the different seasons as well as money for travel expenses, and he handed the clothes to the porter to carry and tucked the money away. He and his wife clung to each other, reluctant to part, while the escorts kept urging him to leave. Finally he steeled himself and left the restaurant with them, followed by the porter.

Before they had gone far, Jia Ming and Wei Bi, who had only just heard the news, came rushing up from behind to see him off. After offering much comforting advice, they each gave him a farewell present and said good-bye with tears in their eyes, then watched as he set out on his journey. Afterward they went back into the city and parted company.

Mistress Wang and her sons, crying brokenheartedly, watched Wu Zhen's figure recede into the distance until they could see him no longer. Her brothers comforted them, and then Mistress Wang went back to her home in the city, to bring the boys up and look after the household, and that is where I shall leave her.

When the governor-general, the governor, and the director of studies had received the submission from the Jiangning lieutenant governor, they prepared a joint petition to the emperor. It was remitted to the Ministries of Rites and Revenue and then, following clarification, resubmitted to the emperor, who, with his great benevolence, issued an order giving permission for Paria's tablet to be enshrined and providing public funds for the construction of a memorial arch. The ministerial order left the capital and made its way from one office to another until it arrived at the Jiangdu yamen. On receiving it, the magistrate sent runners to summon Yuan Shou to court and gave him money from the treasury. The sum allocated for constructing the arch was originally thirty taels, but each office had deducted its charges. Yuan Shou signed a receipt for what remained and took it home with him. Adding some of his own money, he bought materials, hired workmen, and started construction of the arch. He also borrowed funeral articles and insignia, a sedan for the spirit tablet, and so forth. When everything was ready, he selected an auspicious date for the enshrinement. Friends and relatives were informed in advance. When Jia Ming, Wei Bi, and the friends and relatives heard the news, they all brought presents. On

the day itself, the neighboring streets were packed with people, both men and women—an exceptionally lively scene.

Let me turn to Mu Zhu, Yuan You's cousin. He lived in the Mu Family Village on the south side of Huo Family Bridge, where he worked on the family farm. He had taken a wife, who had recently given birth to a son, and Mu Zhu had been meaning to visit the jeweler's on New Victory Street in the city to buy a silver chain and bracelet for the baby. It so happened that Yuan Shou had sent someone to inform the Mu family of the date of the enshrinement, and Mu Zhu's father had promptly prepared congratulatory presents and told Mu Zhu to go to the city for two purposes: to convey congratulations to the Yuan family, and also to buy the chain and bracelet for his grandson. Mu Zhu was elated at the prospect and changed into a completely new outfit—hat, clothes, shoes, and socks—before heading for the city. When he reached the main street outside Old Lane in the Old City, he found crowds of men and women jammed tightly together. He didn't know what the occasion was, but he was forced to observe the scene from a shop doorway. He heard a gong and saw two pairs of tall papier-mâché and bamboo-splint lanterns on which the words "By imperial order, gracious permission for enshrinement" were written in red ink. Then came several pairs of placards signifying the officials' rank with embossed gold characters on a vermilion background, reading, "Candidate for Director of Studies," "Graduate of Provincial Military Examination," and "Candidate for Battalion Commander," "Dame of Candidate for Assistant County Magistrate," and the like. There were also two placards reading, "Keep away" and "Silence," four "Clear the road flying tiger" banners, as well as civil and military insignia. There were also two pairs of yellow signboards with red characters reading, "By imperial order, gracious permission for enshrinement." There were many insignia of rank, a yellow silk umbrella with a gold button, a yellow parasol with a dragon painted on it, and four censers giving off a faint scent. Behind came eight men wearing pale yellow summer hats with red buttons on top and uniforms of yellow cloth, carrying a covered yellow sedan on which an incense table had been set. Behind the sedan were guards and runners, red umbrellas and green parasols, a pair of silver maces, as well as drummers and flutists playing. There were also men from the garrison on two pairs of horses,

and a junior officer wearing a brimless silk hat with a gold button on top and a military uniform riding a lead horse. He was followed by four artemisia braziers.

There were many relatives and friends in bright clothes and caps, each holding Ten Thousand Year incense as they walked proudly by. There were also two servants carrying a pair of large round horn lanterns on which was written "Title of Dame imperially conferred." Behind came four laborers wearing red summer hats without tassels and black uniforms, who were carrying a red sandalwood sedan with carved designs. From its four corners hung small square glass lanterns. Inside the sedan was a spirit tablet of *nanmu* with pale blue characters that read, "Tablet of the Lady Zhen,² virtuous wife of Youying, Master Yuan, on whom according to precedent the title of an Official of the Eighth Rank is conferred. By imperial order to honor her chastity, permission graciously given to build an arch and enshrine her tablet." Directly behind the sedan came a host of different insignia.

No sooner had the procession passed by than the many spectators who had come to see the exciting spectacle began to voice their opinions. One said, "The tablet in that sedan just now was that of a woman by the name of Paria. She not only sacrificed herself at the time of her husband's death, she also had a talent for expressing herself. I've read her 'Eternal Farewell,' which is genuinely moving. She's the most remarkable person ever to come out of the brothels. What a pity she was denied a good coffin and a worthy end to her life! But by living in this glorious age, thanks to His Imperial Majesty's great benevolence, her name will be passed down through the ages—a case of posthumous fame."

"I've seen a lot of jealous women," said the second one, "but I've never seen anyone to equal Yuan You's wife. It's all very well to be jealous and quarrel with your husband during his lifetime, but after her husband's death she transferred her anger to Paria. She stripped off Paria's clothes and didn't dress her properly for the laying-in or allow her a good coffin. Such vicious behavior puts her beyond all other jealous viragoes. And now today Paria is being given this honor! I just wonder what sort of end the wife will come to."

"If this fellow Yuan hadn't dallied with prostitutes and become infatuated with that whore, he never would have abandoned his wife and

forced her to sleep alone," said a third. "That's why she quarreled with him all the time. Yuan You rented a house for Paria and lived with her instead of at home. He treated his wife as a stranger and cut off all communication with her. And now there are no children. Isn't it true that the Yuan family line will come to an end? The Sage said, 'There are three unfilial acts, and leaving no descendants is the worst of them.'³ From this we can see that anyone who dallies with prostitutes is the most unfilial of men."

"If we were to believe what you people say," said a fourth man, "there couldn't be any such person as Paria in the brothels. According to you, whores are all fancy talk and fine promises; they cheat you out of your money; they cause you to be obsessed with sex, to quarrel with your wife, to squander your property, to lose your money and your life; there are simply no good and virtuous women among them. But isn't this tablet we're honoring today that of a prostitute who married and then sacrificed her life in order to die with her husband?"

"You may claim that she's an outstandingly virtuous woman from the brothels," said a fifth man, "but in my opinion, if this fellow Yuan hadn't dallied with prostitutes, married this Paria, and set her up in her own house, he wouldn't have indulged his sexual desires by night and day and worn himself out, developed consumption, and died vomiting blood. In the last analysis, it's best not to go near any of those places."

And so the argument continued, back and forth. Just as they were arriving at a stalemate, they saw a man in his fifties, white-haired, toothless, and haggard, who was clapping his hands and singing in a loud voice:

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
There groups of friends convene,
Just for a cup of tea, they say—
But soon it becomes routine.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
Its splendors have no end.
No matter how you watch your purse,
Once there you'll spend and spend.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
There songs are sung all day.
With wine and music dawn till dark,
Your heart is stolen away.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
Requests are sweetly put
For clothes and jewels, money too—
The bills are hard to foot.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
Love is the greatest danger.
Last night she vowed to marry you;
Today she's wed a stranger.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
She'll praise you to the sky.
But whatever sum you offer her,
She'll never say, "Too high!"

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
Your love won't let you go.
Day and night you will never leave;
Your wife you'll hardly know.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
When all your property's sold,
The love that she has given you
Will suddenly turn cold.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
There love's disease is rife.
With rheumy eyes and scabby head
You may well lose your life.

The brothel's fine, say it over and over.
 Too long was I in thrall.
 I've now escaped the brothel's snare,
 Never again to fall.

He walked along clapping his hands in time to the song and laughing. He gave the appearance of being mad, and the way he was carrying on prompted spectators to follow him in growing numbers. Past Tai-ping Bridge he went, as far as the crossroads on the eastern side, a densely populated area, and then, in a sudden puff of wind, he vanished without a trace.

The people watching were amazed. One man said, "I know that fellow who was singing just now. His name is Guo Shi, style Lairen [Old Hand].⁴ He used to get his greatest pleasure from drinking and staying overnight in the brothels—he was completely infatuated with them. I wonder why he's clapping his hands and singing like that. He must have been cheated by some prostitute and felt so crushed by the experience that he's gone out of his mind. Did you hear those two words 'fine' and 'over' that he kept repeating in his song? I believe that once our affairs in this world reach the point of being fine, they're over. In the case of brothels, the finer we want our experience to be, the sooner it's over. I have no idea where he might have gone. Let me go and tell his family." He hurried off to do so.

His wife and children were astonished. After thanking the man who brought them the news, they fanned out in all directions looking for Old Hand, but although they searched for many days, they found no trace of him. Only later, when I, your narrator, lost my way and ended up on Mount Self-Deception did I learn that he had retired deep into the mountains and become an immortal. There he presented me with this book, *Romantic Illusions*, which contained the following four poems on its final page.

I've racked my brains and spat my blood in vain;
 Romance is unreal, you must understand.
 I send these words to all worthy young men—
 The author of this book is an old hand.

Why do we call our lovers enemies?
The sins of the flesh must be paid when due.
If you lust once more and do further wrong,
She will avenge herself again on you.

Who would have thought that a singsong girl
Of the pleasure quarter would become a wife?
But clients scatter as flowers wither;
And what would await her at the end of life?

For thirty years I went there every day;
I know their empty dreams and vain pretense.
I've written this book, *Romantic Illusions*,
Which is full of nonsense that makes good sense.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Patrick Hanan, "Illusion of Romance and the Courtesan Novel," in *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, 33–57 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

2. The finest is Han Bangqing's *Haishang hua liezhuan*, translated by Eileen Chang and Eva Hung as *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On the courtesans of the Foreign Settlements of Shanghai, see Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

3. Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (New York: John Day, 1935), 161.

4. The *Yangzhou huafang lu*'s detailed listings of streets with their locations may have even suggested the novel's explicit itineraries. See, for example, *juan* 9, pp. 178–190, in the Jiangsu Guangling guji keyinshe edition (Yangzhou, 1984). On the history and geography of Yangzhou, see Antonia Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

5. It is contained in a manuscript collection entitled *Yangzhou fengtu cicui* that is preserved in the Yangzhou Library. It is reprinted in *Yangzhou zhuzhici*, comp. Xia Youlan et al., 82–90 (Yangzhou: privately printed, 1992). Only the author's studio name is given: Hanpu jiying of Yizheng.

6. For example, there are poems on the young men who take a small boat and follow the others (chap. 16), on mimics (chap. 13), on the *mapi* (chap. 16), on the impounding of boats (chap. 4), on the tea kiosk (chap. 16), as well as other poems on

clothes, hairstyles, pipes, venereal disease, gambling, teashops, and opium. *Fengyue meng* is also related to some earlier oral and vernacular literature that deals with courtesans, loan-sharking, and gambling (Hanan, "Illusion of Romance," 41–42).

7. Yan Duanshu et al., eds., *Xuzuan Yangzhoufu zhi* (1874), *juan* 17 and 18. A widow's suicide for love is also very rare in fiction. A story in the late-Ming collection *Xing shi yan* (no. 10) is one example. The case in *Rulin waishi* (*The Scholars*), chap. 48, is of a young widow pressured by her father into killing herself.

8. Hu Shi, "Zhencao wenti," *Xin Qingnian* 5, no. 1 (July 15, 1918): 11.

9. It was first entitled *Mengyou Shanghai mingji zheng feng zhuan*. It has been reprinted several times since, sometimes under different titles. *Fengyue meng* was also utilized in other ways in the same period. The novel *Shenlou waishi*, of which there is an 1895 edition, reprints without acknowledgment the whole of the vaudeville section (chap. 10) as its own chap. 8.

10. This translation is based principally on the edition edited by Wang Junnian in *Xiaoshuo erjuan*, Zhongguo jindai wenxue zuopin xilie (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1990) and secondarily on that edited by Hua Yun and published by Beijing University Press in 1990. Use has also been made of the 1883 Shenbaoguan edition in the Harvard-Yenching Library.

Chapter 1

1. "Flowers" stands for prostitutes.

2. In Ming and Qing dynasty literature Guan Zhong (725–645 B.C.E.) was often credited with creating the brothel as an institution. The belief was apparently based, erroneously, on a reference in the early historical text *Zhan guo ce* (*Intrigues of the Warring States*).

3. I.e., of romantic excess.

4. The text has Jiaochang (the Parade) before Lower Commerce Street, which is a mistake, presumably by an editor.

5. A widespread brothel custom. Potential clients could visit a brothel and be given a tea party at which they would meet the prostitutes. The party was nominally free of charge.

6. The name is a pun on *guolai ren* (old hand, veteran).

7. Daoist deities.

Chapter 2

1. I.e., the borrower received ten or twenty percent less than the face amount, but had to repay the face amount when the loan fell due. This kind of loan was

designed to hide the fact that the true interest rate was being set at an illegally high level.

2. The Parade (Jiaochang) was the main entertainment center of the New City. Yangzhou at this time was composed of two walled cities situated side by side, with the New City to the east.

3. Yangzhou was the center of the rich Lianghuai region of the government salt monopoly.

4. A famous fan maker, whose shop was on Fan Lane (Shanzi xiang) in Hangzhou.

5. Mexican silver dollars, acquired through foreign trade, were in wide circulation as a second currency.

6. The origin was foreign, but it had long been copied by Chinese artisans.

7. A prose-and-verse genre in which the performer accompanied himself with drum and gong.

8. I.e., he was in line to take the post.

9. Tang-dynasty coins.

10. *Fenzhang*, by which a prostitute's earnings were shared with the brothel. *Kunzhang*, the other type of contract found in this novel, meant that the woman was sold to the brothel in return for a periodic payment made to her family. I translate the latter term as "indentured."

11. Raw opium was used by women, especially, as a means of committing suicide.

12. Lizhentang. It was established in 1840 through private funds donated by a merchant. It was intended for the reclamation of young prostitutes.

13. I.e., dupes or suckers.

Chapter 3

1. When the original Daichunlin shop proved highly successful, it was imitated by other shops set up nearby that called themselves by the same name.

2. On the eastern wall of the Old City, between the Old and New Cities.

3. A hardwood much used in furniture, ranging in color from red to gold.

4. A Yangzhou artist who flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century. Most of the artists mentioned in these pages were the author's contemporaries and, quite possibly, his acquaintances.

5. A hardwood used for furniture in the Yangzhou region, especially in the nineteenth century.

6. A Yangzhou artist.

7. The recipient may possibly have been Yuan You's father or grandfather.

8. A calligrapher from Yizheng, near Yangzhou city (Yan Duanshu et al., *Xuzuan Yangzhoufu zhi* [1874], 16.4b).

9. Meaning long life.

10. The character *bo* is explained by Lin Sumen as wood stuck on a brick base (*Hanjiang sanbai yin* [Yangzhou, 1808], 3.12a). It was apparently a Yangzhou specialty. I translate it according to context as either paneled or veneered.

11. Fang Hua lived in Yangzhou during the first half of the nineteenth century. He was a friend of Wang Yingxiang.

12. Yu Chan, style Buqing (Yan, *Xuzuan Yangzhoufu zhi*, 16.1b). Large landscapes were his specialty.

13. Wang Su, style Xiaomou (1794–1877).

14. Not yet identified.

15. Ni Can, style Yantian, of Yangzhou (1764–1841).

16. Liu Yi, style Guzun, of Yangzhou.

17. The rhapsody, by the Tang poet Du Mu, was a piece much favored by calligraphers. Qian Wenshan has not yet been identified.

18. A detailed account of this kind of opium smoking is quoted in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911 ed., s.v. “Opium.”

19. The styles of Lu Shu and Yuan You, respectively.

20. The islet of Little Gold Hill is set in the scenic system of lakes and waterways to the north and northwest of the city.

Chapter 4

1. In the Old City.

2. I.e., the borrower receives a loan of only twenty-seven taels but has to repay (and pay interest on) the nominal sum of thirty taels.

3. Jie and Zhou were infamous tyrants of the Xia and Shang dynasties, respectively.

4. The original loan was for thirty taels (of which he actually received twenty-seven). The interest was three. Two months' interest in arrears comes to one eighty, and an extra three months' interest to four fifty. Closing charges come to four, and the so-called discount (10 percent of fifty) to five. The total by Yuan's calculations: forty-eight thirty.

5. The quality of noodles was distinguished by price. *Yangzhou meng*, by Zhou Sheng, describes the author's experiences in Yangzhou from about 1840 ([Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1959], *juan* 3, p. 47).

6. Li Dou gives this as the name of one of the large pleasure boats (*Yangzhou*

huafang lu [*The Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou*] [author's preface dated 1795]; see 1984 ed., Jiangsu Guangling keyinshe, 18.404). It may have been a traditional name.

7. The Cangjingyuan (Scripture Repository) was one of four monasteries in the grounds of the famous Tianning Temple, which was just north of the city wall. The author did not find it necessary to point out the irony of a brothel's leasing part of a monastery for its business. What is remarkable is that the name he gives the brothel—Jinyulou, or Advancing-the-Jade Hall—is that of *another* of the four monasteries attached to the temple. See Li, *Yangzhou huafang lu*, 4.91, on the monasteries.

8. On the northern wall of the New City.

Chapter 5

1. I.e., rectangular but with rounded ends.

2. The pear-shaped *pipa*, a plucked instrument.

3. Auspicious objects such as a pearl, an old coin, a mirror, and so forth.

4. The original West Chamber story of Yingying and Zhang, by Yuan Zhen (779–831).

5. An incident in *Story of the Stone*, chap. 62.

6. An incident involving characters from *Story of the Stone*. The Naiad's House was Lin Daiyu's.

7. A commonplace in fiction from at least the Ming dynasty.

8. A kind of firework.

9. These sites were south of the city wall. Lu Shu and Fragrance were high enough up to see over the whole of the walled city.

10. Counters of ivory or bone were often used in drinking games. In this novel, they are used by courtesans when singing songs as a substitute for drinking.

11. The song is based on an incident in chap. 50 of *Story of the Stone*. The poetry society is meeting in Li Yan's Snowy Rushes Retreat. Baoyu has performed abysmally in composing linked verses, and as a penalty Li Yan has sent him to ask the prickly nun Miaoyu (Adamantina) in her Green Bower Hermitage for some sprigs of plum blossom from her tree.

12. A song from Tang Xianzu's play *Handanji*, scene 3. Perhaps more significant, it is sung in chap. 63 of *Story of the Stone* by the young actress Fangguan (Parfumée).

13. *Huqin*, a single-stringed bowed instrument.

14. Erhuang and Xipi were two independent kinds of music that, in the nineteenth century, were combined to form the music of what is now known as Beijing opera.

15. A species of magnolia.

16. The first words in the lines of the Chinese text make up the courtesan's name. "Moon" (*yue*) and "fragrance" (*xiang*) combine to form Fragrance's name, *Yuxiang*.

17. The Jinyulou was outside the city wall, and the gates were closed late at night.

18. A common topic, usually on the West Chamber theme.

Chapter 6

1. In the Old City. The wall mentioned is the one dividing the Old and New Cities.

2. An S-shaped design that symbolized good luck.

3. I.e., beauty patches.

4. A symbol of good luck.

5. The reader has to imagine that Mu Zhu takes "courtesan," a word he doesn't know, as "cousin." The Chinese word *biaozi* (prostitute) is a homonym of *biaozi* (female cousin).

Chapter 7

1. The famous early novel *Shuihu zhuan*.

2. The Four Books of Confucian doctrine: *The Analects*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning*, and *Mencius*.

3. The famous early opera *Xixiang ji*. The quotations are drawn from the songs, not the dialogue.

4. Lu Junyi, whose nickname was Jade Unicorn; *Analects*, 11.9; *West Chamber* (the Jin Shengtan version, popular at the time), act 4, scene 3.

5. The song may be conventional in the sense that it is full of stock imagery. Note, however, that Wu Zhen constantly belittles his mistress.

6. Xiao Rang; *Analects*, 7.37; *West Chamber*, act 2, scene 1.

7. Lu Zhishen; *Great Learning*, 1.4; *West Chamber*, act 2, scene 1. The "Penitence" is a Buddhist work that is said to have been composed by Emperor Wu of the Liang for his deceased wife.

8. Yan Qing; *Mencius*, 3A.3.6; *West Chamber*, act 2, scene 3.

9. *Nü xiao jing*, by a Tang-dynasty author.

10. A contemporary popular song tune. There are examples in *juan* 12 of Zhuxiang Zhuren's *Xiao hui ji*, of which there is an 1837 edition.

11. This line is found in a number of songs on the West Chamber theme.
12. This joke still circulates in a variety of forms. The speaker is usually a rich man with cultural aspirations, and, having used the word “mother,” he has to balance it with “father.” Note that “fortune” and “father” are near homonyms (*fu*).
13. Song Jiang; *Analects*, 10.16.5; *West Chamber*, act 4, scene 1.
14. Many popular songs were structured on the sequence of the five watches into which the night was divided.
15. A strong type of opium produced in Bengal.
16. Literally, foster fathers, a term of respect used by the courtesans when addressing gang members, runners, and the like.
17. A common idiom, meaning that they will take notice only of force, not virtue.

Chapter 8

1. See the *Meng xiang ci* in *Yangzhou zhuzhici liuzhong*, ed. Du Zhaotang (Taipei: Jianguo shudian, 1951), 7b. According to the editor’s note, it was the custom when seeing off visiting women or children to give them benzoin scent.
2. To drive out evil influences.
3. A deity who reforms the wicked.
4. When debts had to be settled.
5. “String of cash” puns on Guanzhi.

Chapter 9

1. I.e., find a good client for her.
2. On the twenty-third of the twelfth month.
3. I.e., a sucker.

Chapter 10

1. In the New City.
2. In the Chinese text a list of the slips is given, including the sources and the prizes, but not, of course, the solutions.
3. “No sacrifices on yin days” (*Yin bu ji si*) is identical in sound to “Silver won’t help in the matter” (*Yin bu ji shi*), of which the clue is “Only gold can help in a

crisis.” (Note that *si* and *shi* are pronounced alike in Yangzhou dialect.) All of the riddles here, known as the Zhaoyang type, are on this principle. The contestant is given the clue and the title or source and asked to come up with the original quotation.

4. The source is given as *yan* (proverb, popular saying). The quotation is *Wu ying wu ye* and the clue *Wu yin wu ye*. *Yin* and *ying* are pronounced the same in Yangzhou dialect.

5. All of the listed riddles appear to be of the Zhaoyang type. (Zhaoyang is an early name for Xinghua, in the vicinity of Yangzhou, where this type is said to have originated.) Note the number of the Zhaoyang type in the publications of the Zhushu chunshe poetry society (Aisu Sheng [Lover of Simplicity], ed., *Zhushu chunshe chao*, reprinted in *Zhonghua mishu jicheng*, ed. Gao Boyu et al. [Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1991], 1:367–423). The explanation of this riddle is given in the *Zhushu chunshe chao*, 371 (fanli). It involves two moves, first via synonyms, then via homonyms. *Shang xin* (brokenhearted) is read as *bei* (sad); *xi wen* (ask about) is read as *pan* (question); *erfu* (husband) is read as *lang* (husband); and *bing* (illness) is read as *ji* (illness). Then the new version, *bei pan lang ji*, is read as homonyms in the common phrase “empty cups and dishes scattered about.” Note that we have been given a clue as to the general area of the answer.

6. Another characteristic Yangzhou type. *Dan* (true, red), *dai* (age), and *chuan* (hand down) are read as the homonyms “worried,” “bring,” and “boat,” respectively. The area of the answer is “human activity,” and the answer proves to be “pulling a boat upstream.”

7. *Shi shuo xinyu*, 11.3. This is the founding example of the type. Cao E was a famous filial daughter. As Cao Cao and a companion were passing by the stele erected in her honor, they saw this inscription on the back of the stele. Cao Cao guessed that the riddle meant “Utterly wonderful, lovely words.” For example, “yellow pongee” means “colored silk,” and the characters for “colored” (*se*) and “silk” (*si*), when combined, form the character for “utterly” (*jue*). “Youthful wife” means “young [*shao*] woman [*nü*],” which, when combined together, form “lovely” (*miao*), and so forth.

8. The type was supposedly invented by the Song poets Su Shi and Huang Tingjian. Only a couple of samples exist, perhaps because of its inherent difficulty. To the best of my knowledge, this riddle, using a sentence from *Mencius*, appears only in the Yangzhou riddle collection *Zhushu chunshe chao* (1:375). The solution is given, but the intermediate stage is not clear, to the translator at least.

9. Jia Ming separates the word for riddle into its component parts as “mystifying words.”

10. Jiang Taigong, who became adviser to the founders of the Zhou dynasty, is said to have fished with a straight piece of metal instead of a hook. In fact, he was waiting to be “discovered” by the Zhou kings. See the Yuan-dynasty historical tale *Wu Wang fa Zhou*.

11. I.e., the life of prostitution.

12. *Yinyuan*.

Chapter 11

1. The first characters in the words translated as “brush” and “mirror” are homonyms or near homonyms of the characters for Paria’s name.

2. The mirror is referred to in a common image as a caltrop flower. Paria’s forced interpretation is, of course, designed to provoke Yuan You.

3. The *Thousand Poems* (*Qian jia shi*) is a popular Song-dynasty anthology. However, these much-quoted lines were actually written by the early-Ming poet Gao Qi, in one of his “Nine Poems in Praise of the Plum Tree.” “Hermit” and “Beauty” are both images applied to the plum tree and its blossom, which makes Yuan You’s choice of the lines seem even more ludicrous.

4. Paria pretends to take the lines as descriptive of her genitalia.

5. I.e., deflowering.

Chapter 12

1. The Prince of Spring means the first month of spring. The emperor was traditionally hailed as living for ten thousand years.

2. A kind of tael that “had a more or less national range” (Lien-sheng Yang, *Money and Credit in China* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952], 47).

3. Both lines refer to examination success, but their meaning is here extended to another sphere.

4. A particular character is chosen. The leader quotes a line with that character in it. If, for example, that character is in the third place in the line, the person sitting in the third place at the table has to respond, and so on.

5. Shi Kefa (1602–1645), the general who tried to defend Yangzhou against the invading Manchu army.

6. Debts were settled three times a year, at major festivals, of which this was one.

7. The festivals were held in the summer, on the fifth of the fifth month, the eighteenth of the sixth month, and the fifteenth of the seventh month.

Chapter 13

1. In the text it is Lu Shu who watches the boats and Fragrance who lays on the feast—clearly a mistake.

2. *Zongzi*, glutinous rice mixed with other ingredients and wrapped in bamboo leaves.

3. Types of fireworks.

4. The text refers to Huizhou, from which many of the Yangzhou pawnbrokers came.

5. Li Dou, *Yangzhou huafang lu* (*The Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou*) (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling keyinshe, 1984), 11.245.

6. See the *Xiyouji* (*Journey to the West*), chaps. 40–42, in which the Red Boy monster is subdued by Guanyin. *Yangzhou huafang lu* describes it as one of the acts performed by boys on the stern of the dragon boats (11.240).

7. Carp trying to leap up the Dragon's Gate symbolize candidates attempting to succeed in the civil service examinations.

8. A story about Zhang Fei, one of the warrior heroes of the *Sanguo tongsu yanyi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*).

9. According to the nineteenth-century Suzhou writer Gu Lü, vaudeville reached Suzhou from Yangzhou. He lists a number of the turns described here (*Tong qiao yi zhou lu* [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980], 12.163).

10. The strategist Su Qin in the third century B.C.E. helped to form an alliance of six states against the powerful state of Qin. He is said to have been honored by all six states.

11. There is a pun on *fengyue* (romance) in this line.

12. This refers to the homonymous *shi hu* (ten pots), a card game.

13. There is a contradiction in the text with regard to time; the clock strikes twice now and also at the end of the chapter. This hour should no doubt be earlier than two.

14. A widespread type of entertainment performed by two or three people, one of whom performed with a fan while another played the fiddle. The titles belong to a standard repertoire.

15. The title is *Da lianxiang*. “Prodigal” refers to its subject matter.

Chapter 14

1. One *qian* is equal to 1/10 ounce.

2. A listing of common surnames that served as elementary reading material.

3. Meaning “light.”

4. A martial Daoist deity, whose image is often the guardian at the gate of a Daoist temple.

Chapter 15

1. This story has not been identified.

2. In this dance a shaman dresses up as a god and drives away the demons of illness.

3. In the *Huayan sutra* Sudhana (Shancai) visits fifty-three sages and other worthies.

4. It is not known what kind of trick this referred to.

Chapter 16

1. In fact, Emperor Qianlong gave the temple its name during his visit in 1765.

2. Guanyin.

3. I.e., they knelt down with the stool in front of them. A joss stick would have been attached to it.

4. Li Dou, *Yangzhou huafang lu* (*The Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou*) (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling keyinshe, 1984), 13.290.

5. A dish of eggs was traditionally provided to friends and family when a woman was pregnant or gave birth.

6. See Li, *Yangzhou huafang lu*, 16.347, for a description of the *mapi* and their activities.

7. *The Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiao jing*), first section.

8. A traditional card game known as *shi hu* (ten pots), also known as *shi hu* (ten lakes). It was often accompanied by gambling. By picking up and discarding cards, the aim was to collect sequences of numbers in the same suit. Since the suits were much the same as in mahjong, I have used the common English mahjong terms here.

9. The first line of a song in Hong Sheng's (1605–1704) famous play *Chang sheng dian* (*The Palace of Eternal Youth*). In the play the singer is the musician Li Guinian, who is recounting the history of the emperors' power for the benefit of his favorite, Yang Guifei.

10. The song is from the play *Mudan ting* (*Peony Pavilion*), by the Ming playwright Tang Xianxu. It is also one of the songs that Lin Daiyu overhears, and is strangely moved by, in chap. 23 of *Story of the Stone*.

Chapter 17

1. A woman's jealousy.

Chapter 18

1. *Xinsi* is one of the terms in the sixty-year cycle.
2. The styles of Jia Ming, Wu Zhen, and Wei Bi, respectively.
3. The reference is to the story "Shenxian zhuan" (Tales of Immortals), in which two young men, Liu and Ruan, meet and fall in love with two divine maidens. See the *Taiping guangji*, 61.
4. I.e., the number of years is not a multiple of ten.

Chapter 19

1. *Piao feizi*, meaning literally something like sluice out your insides.

Chapter 20

1. Mount Ling, in Henan province, was famous for its ancient Buddhist temples.

Chapter 22

1. *Jin* means "gold" and is also a surname. The surname Yin is a near homonym of the word for "silver."

Chapter 24

1. The chief officer, or jail warden.
2. Instead of the nominal one thousand. Yuan You was in fact taking a commission on top of the extra money he had obtained from Wu Zhen's wife.

Chapter 25

1. A *jian* is not the same thing as a room; it is a division of a house, usually measuring about nine by twelve feet, within the uprights supporting the roof.

Chapter 26

1. He was eighth in seniority in the male line in his generation of the family. His name, Wangba, is also a common term of abuse.
2. The word translated as “married” is *cong liang*. Used of a prostitute, it means she has shed her inferior status by marrying, usually as a concubine.
3. *Si* means four or fourth.
4. Possibly meaning a male prostitute.
5. Tinfoil sacrificial offerings.
6. The house was evidently on the west side of Ridge Street, backing onto the moat. The Taiping Dock was at the southern end of Ridge Street.

Chapter 27

1. This refers to a popular belief that if you adopt you will shortly afterward bear a child yourself.
2. Supposedly the best time for conception.

Chapter 28

1. Souls held in limbo until released by such services.
2. The text puts Mistress Dai at the head of this list, evidently by mistake. She was still in Suzhou.
3. I.e., been forced to take clients.
4. Literally, drum song verse.
5. Kinds of decorative lantern.
6. With willow branches.
7. I.e., the Duanyang Festival.

Chapter 29

1. Denoting an official of the fifth rank or above.
2. A form of patronage seeking.
3. Many northerners had migrated to Qingjiang (later known as Huaiyin).

Chapter 31

1. *Chong xi*. The term usually means to banish the demons of illness by arranging some joyous experience, such as a wedding. Here it is extended to mean banishing the demons of illness by anticipating the worst.

2. I. e., the reaction of a jealous wife.

Chapter 32

1. Stock names for prisoner escorts.

2. Her surname.

3. See *Mencius*, 4A.26.

4. *Guo Lairen* is a pun on *guolai ren* (old hand).